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Friends, we're announcing the release of '[The Regressed Demon Lord is Kind](#)', and updating the initial 6-book Amazon release of Sovereign of the Three Realms, with the next 6 books in the series waiting for Amazon approval!

The Regressed Demon Lord is Kind: This is a rather different story from most of the reincarnation stories we've seen in the past! In his past life, Zich was an outcast youth who, in an obsessive quest for power, became known as the 'Demon Lord of Strength'. His reign, however, came to an end...

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The first year of Zhenguan. The Emperor of Great Tang, Li Shimin, was ruling the country. Under his rule, the country was at peace and the citizens were satisfied. The curtains had opened into the flourishing age and the citizens of Chang'an were particularly happy.

Third month of Spring. The peony flower in the Duke Lu Residence [1] had bloomed.

A beautiful lady strolled out from the main door. She had large clear eyes and neat eyebrows. She wore a high-waisted long skirt, decorated with beautiful round embroidery, looking elegant and delicate.

“Aaa—” A bird’s chirp filled the air.

The beautiful lady lifted her head, exchanging glances with the owl perched on the roof. Her demeanor caused the bird to fly away in surprise. She huffed before walking quickly to the front of the main building. She saw an old and a young man moving in circles in a hall.

The older one, with a fierce and black face, was her father. He was famous all over the land and his name was Sheng Xiaojing. The younger one, with a white and handsome face, was the eldest of her younger brothers. He was famous all over Chang'an for being a ‘playboy’ and his name was Sheng Chumu.

At this very moment, Sheng Chumu’s hands were shielding his own butt as he ran back and forth. He looked rather ‘graceful’. Although

he occasionally got hit, he was still filled with energy. On the other hand, Sheng Xiaojing was panting, clearly tired from the chase.

“I, Sheng Xiaojing, have spent half my life on the battlefield. When it comes to bravery or accomplishments, I have never lost to Lu Yunji. Why is it that when you meet with Lu Qi, you always get beaten up? You useless bum!” Sheng Xiaojing bellowed as he chased. He wasn’t angry that his son got into a fight, he was angry that his son could not win the fight.

Sheng Chumu tilted his head. He was nursing a black eye but still did not admit to his abilities. He hit his own face proudly. “Who said that I cannot beat Lu Qi? Amongst all the men in Chang’an, I have always ranked first with the ladies.”

Sheng Xiaojing huffed, “What ranking?”

Sheng Chumu halted as he repeated seriously, “The ranking of man amongst ladies—”

Sheng Xiaojing took the chance to catch up. He swung his hand and the sound of a stick whipping through the air could be heard.

Sheng Chumu shouted, “Father, you cheated!”

“There is nothing called cheating in tactics!” A hint of pride appeared on Sheng Xiaojing’s face. However, he did not stop his actions, he was determined to make his son remember this lesson.

Sheng Chumu thought that he was screwed this time. All of a sudden, a flower appeared in the corner of his eye as someone stood between him and his father. The round flower embroidery and that elegant dress was very familiar.

“Elder Sister!” Upon recognising the person, Sheng Chumu quickly swapped places with the beautiful lady. The second he turned his back, he stiffened his back to bear the brunt of the stick.

Bam! One firm whack into his memory. It was so painful, stars appeared in Sheng Chumu’s eyes! The beautiful lady was married and was now known as Consort Han, taking after her husband’s surname. It was also his most beloved Elder Sister!

Consort Han's expression was anxious as she held onto Sheng Chumu. She softly berated him, "Ah Mu, are you stupid? How can father hit me?"

As Sheng Xiaojing saw his son's face scrunched up in pain, he thought that at least this brat was protective of his sister. He then threw the stick away and returned to his seat. He was still huffing.

Consort Han asked, "Why did you suddenly fight with Lu Qi?"

Sheng Chumu reached his hand to massage his own back as he answered sharply, "Lu Qi was fighting with me for a girl named Yan'er at Swallow House."

Sheng Xiaojing lifted his fist. "You still dare to speak? Bastard..."

"Bastard!" Consort Han took over the end of his sentence. She looked displeased. "Who is Lu Yunji? How dare his son beat my younger brother over a prostitute? Do they even have any respect for the Han Mansion?"

"Why are you and your mother the same? You all only know how to let him do what he wants!" Sheng Xiaojing had resisted saying this for a while. "Do you know that he is infamous for being Chang'an's number one hedonist? The family's business that I spent so much effort to build will go to ruins in his hands."

"Father, the borders are facing unrest and the Emperor thinks you are too old. That is why he appointed Lu Yunji as the Great General. You are taking your anger out on me." Sheng Chumu added on shamelessly and gave a constipated smile, "There is no use getting angry with me, the one you should find is His Majesty."

Sheng Xiaojing fumed, "Even if I am old, I don't need you to ruin my reputation!" After finishing what he wanted to say, he walked to the wall and took down the lance that made him famous. His face was murderous as he turned around and headed for Sheng Chumu.

Seeing how things were going downhill, Consort Han silently nudged Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu immediately got the hint and ran. Sheng Xiaojing was held back by his elder daughter and could only

stomp his foot in anger.

No one would have thought that with this run, Sheng Chumu would take the first step on a life that is the complete opposite of 'hedonist'.

1. The title is Duke Lu, but not their last name

Court Lady

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Second reign of the Tang Dynasty. Springtime.

Life was booming in spring. The great yellow plains stretched as far as the eyes could reach as the boundless green grass of the paddy field waved in the wind. Two horses cut through the wind, kicking up puffs of sand, causing the sun to appear red. It looked as if someone had painted a haze over the scenery. The view was picturesque.

On the horses' backs, there was a master and his servant. Luggage hung from the horses, they looked like they were going to a faraway place. The young master was refined and graceful. He wore a green garment, and anyone could tell that he was a scholar.

The young man suddenly heard someone shout for him from behind.

"Du Ning, Du Ning!" Sheng Chumu was sitting unsteadily on his horse. His horse was slightly uncontrolled, and he looked as if he would fall off at any moment.

Sheng Chumu had come out of his residence, wanting to find his good friend, Du Ning, to go have some fun. Who knew that Du Ning would not be around? He was told that Du Ning was headed to Guangzhou to attend a wedding. When Sheng Chumu found out, he rushed over, not wanting to miss out on the fun.

When Du Ning heard Sheng Chumu's voice, he wanted to laugh and

cry at the same time. *With this guy around, nothing good would come out of it. Usually it was fine, but this time he was going to attend a wedding. He was not going to create trouble for his relatives.* Although this was what he thought in his mind, he still pulled on the reins of his horse and waited for Sheng Chumu to catch up. After all, Sheng Chumu only had him as his only friend.

“Du Ning, why are you going so fast? Is your cousin’s wife that beautiful?” Sheng Chumu’s butt was sore from getting rubbed against the saddle. It was so painful he could not sit still as he kept on hissing in pain.

Du Ning could not bother to reply. He was not like Sheng Chumu who only had eyes for beautiful ladies and would eye his younger cousin’s future wife whom he had yet to meet.

All of a sudden, an army appeared in front of them. They moved in formation and their armour shone. They all wore satisfied looks upon their faces. Sheng Chumu caught sight of the flag that was waving in the air. The huge “Lu” character displayed on it caused him to squint. Acting according to the Emperor’s orders, Lu Yunji had led an army to subdue rebel troops and was returning victorious.

“Great General Lu has divided and conquered the rebel army. Brilliant!” Chang’an had received news and Du Ning was no exception.

Sheng Chumu rolled his eyes at Du Ning.

Lu Yunji and Sheng Xiaojing were both founding officials to the Emperor. However, Sheng Xiaojing was much older and has suffered numerous injuries throughout his years. The Emperor no longer sent him out to the battlefield. On the other hand, Lu Yunji dominated on matters relating to the army and was extremely prominent in court. Their fathers silently competed against each other, so naturally, Sheng Chumu would clash with Lu Qi whenever they meet.

At this moment, Sheng Chumu’s personal manservant, Junhui, hurried over with a carriage. Sheng Chumu slowly got off his horse with Junhui’s help. Wincing and limping, he made his way to the horse carriage, crying out in pain with every step.

“Your father, Sheng Xiaojing, is famous all over the land especially back in his days. Yet, you didn’t inherit even a single bit of his powerful demeanor.” Du Ning did not care about Sheng Chumu’s eyeroll and said what he thought.

Sheng Chumu climbed onto the carriage clumsily and sat in. He turned back and grinned at Du Ning, not showing any hint of self-reflection.

“Ah ah, don’t be jealous. This is called fate! Predecessors plant trees so that the later generation can sit in the shade. Grandfather served the country his entire life, of course I have to enjoy the benefits on his behalf. If not, why would the emperor confer the title of Duke on our Sheng family? It’s for us to enjoy the rest of our lives!”

The Lu family’s infantry rode towards them. “Who stopped their horse carriage here? Make way!”

The soldiers brandished their whip at the horses attached to the horse carriage. The horses kicked up in a frenzy, causing the carriage to topple to the side. Sheng Chumu cried out as he was thrown out of the carriage, looking extremely dishevelled.

“How dare you! This is the eldest son of Duke Lu!” Du Ning was still extremely loyal and immediately brought up Sheng Chumu’s father.

The soldiers burst out in laughter, “Duke Lu, Duke Rou, who cares! We only recognize our great general! Look at you guys, a bunch of sneaky looking people. I am eighty-percent sure that you are spies from the rebel army!”

The group of soldiers rushed over as they surrounded Sheng Chumu and Du Ning’s group. They brandished their weapons as a murderous aura filled the air.

“What is going on?” Lu Yunji noticed the commotion and personally came over to take a look. All the soldiers immediately looked respectful.

“General, they are spies from the rebel army.” The infantry soldiers clasped their hands respectfully as they reported.

Sheng Chumu pushed away the soldiers that were holding on to him and neaten his clothes. Stepping up to Lu Yunji, he bowed, "Uncle Lu, I am your nephew, Sheng Chumu. Congratulations on your victory, Uncle Lu."

Lu Yunji smiled, "Oh, it is you. What are you doing here?"

"I am headed to Guangzhou with a friend. We accidentally blocked the road with our horse carriage, and they framed us as spies. If you hadn't recognized me, I believe my head would have been chopped off and offered to you." Sheng Chumu replied.

Lu Yunji glanced at his soldiers as he asked coldly, "Is that true?"

His soldiers kneeled down in fear. "We were careless, please forgive us, Great General!"

Lu Yunji ordered lightly, "Behead them all."

Incessant wails of anguish filled the air as blood stained the ground. In a blink of an eye, tens of lives were lost. Lu Yunji, however, behaved as if this was not happening in front of him. He continued to smile at Sheng Chumu and exchange greetings, asking him about the recent issues, speaking regretfully about how the emperor did not send him out to battle. He mentioned how in order to obtain fine wine from the emperor, he had to experience dealing with the rebel army.

Sheng Chumu may have sensed Lu Yunji mocking his own father but chose to ignore it as he replied modestly, "On behalf of my father, thank you, Uncle Lu."

Lu Yunji addressed the remainder of his army that had just arrived, "Although they disobeyed military rules, ultimately, they were still part of our army and have made some contributions. Don't let them be too lonely on their journey ahead in the afterlife. Select a hundred captives and kill them. Let them accompany our soldiers to the underworld, let them help our soldiers of the Great Tang army pave the way."

The soldiers obeyed and went to carry out their orders.

Immediately, cries loud enough to shock the heavens could be heard from the captives.

Seeing how the captives were all either old, weak or female, Sheng Chumu could not help but say, "My father used to say it was not ethical to kill captives. These captives did not do anything wrong. They are all elderly, female or children. Uncle Lu, please have mercy on them."

Lu Yunji disagreed, "These are all family members of the rebel army. They are not even worth more than an ant. As a descendent from a family of generals, how can you be soft hearted?"

With a single command, the entire ground became bloodstained.

Sheng Chumu averted his eyes as he looked at the wide plains stretched before him. If he had to become a general who treated people's lives as if they were nothing, he would rather be Chang'an's number one playboy and spend his life cherishing an uncountable number of beautiful women.

Guangzhou. Fu Residence.

The 'xi' word was plastered all over windows, and the entire house was decorated in a celebrative red. People were moving about, exchanging congratulatory words as if a miracle had happened.

On a crescent bench, the shadow of a beauty could be seen looking thin and cold, a complete contrast from the indigo wedding dress she was wearing.

Second Madam gazed at the outline of her daughter's back as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Stop crying." Fu Rou instructed coldly.

"You are going to be married soon, as your mother, why can't I cry?" Second Madam ignored her.

"Rou'er, you should be more understanding towards your mother."

Third Madam said as she walked through the Fu family's front door. Her figure was smooth, and she was dressed charmingly. "Your mother is not like me. I have a son and a daughter. Even when my daughter marries, I still have Tao'er with me. Your mother only has you, now that you are going to be married, how can she not cry?"

Third Madam looked at Second Madam. "Second Madam, you shouldn't be so upset. Rou'er is blessed that even at nineteen she is able to find someone devoted to her from the Chen family."

Fu Rou turned and looked at Third Madam coldly, "Third Madam, are you here for something?"

"Of course, I am here to congratulate you." Third Madam picked up a fresh flower from the dresser and moved to place it by Fu Rou's temple.

Fu Rou avoided her and took the flower. "One flower is enough."

"All these years, you took care of our internal affairs, it must have been tough on you. I should help you add one more flower."

Before Third Madam finished her sentence, Fu Rou had already placed the flower back on the dresser. Third Madam's expression darkened as she threw Old Maid Chang a look.

Old Maid Chang forced a laugh, "Congratulations, Lady Rou. As for the family's accounts--"

Fu Rou's servant, Ziyun, immediately cut her off, "Who comes to ask for the family's account book during a time like this?"

"Now that you are part of the Chen family, it is inappropriate to continue holding on to your maiden family's account book." Third Madam looked as if she wanted to laugh, "Moreover, I am here on orders of our family head."

Fu Rou stared coldly at Third Madam as a look of understanding flashed through her eyes. In the second that Third Madam averted her gaze, "Ziyun, hand over the accounts."

Ziyun frowned, "But..."

Fu Rou turned her head and faced the dresser mirror. "Give it to her."

Ziyun had no choice but to retrieve the account book. As soon as she turned around, Old Maid Chang had snatched it over and handed it to Third Madam.

"The sedan from the Chen family has arrived." First Madam of the Fu family said as she entered the room with her daughter, Fu Jun, supporting her arm. Oblivious of the exchange that has just occurred, she called out joyfully, "Is everything ready?"

Fu Rou got up to greet them.

Fu Jun helped Fu Rou up and quietly reminded her, "Younger Sister, once you get to your husband's home, you can't behave as you have before. You must control your temperament and be filial to them."

Fu Rou let out a soft sound of assent. Fu Rou grabbed onto a circular fan as she lowered her eyes and covered her face. She suppressed the coldness in her eyes and allowed herself to be escorted.

Meanwhile, Sheng Chumu followed Du Ning and had reached the Chen family.

First Lady Chen, who had long forgotten what Du Ning looked like, enthusiastically asked him about his official position and what his rank was. Du Ning expressed that he was currently still studying and only had some friends that were government officials.

First Lady Chen did not believe him and took it as Du Ning being modest. "As the saying goes, to meet the prime minister, you must first go through the seven ranks below him. Nephew, since you are close to them, you must be at least rank five, no, rank four?"

Sheng Chumu burst out laughing, "First Lady Chen, you must know a lot."

It was then that First Lady Chen noticed him. "This is--"

Sheng Chumu joked as he self-introduced, "According to your logic, I

guess I will be rank nine?”

First Lady Chen raised her eyebrows as she seemed to look down on him, “Rank nine is somewhat low, but I guess it is still a government position. You can still help keep up our appearance for today.”

Sheng Chumu held back his laughter and winked at Du Ning.

“Aunty, is the new bride’s household special?” Du Ning asked.

“The older sister of the bride had initially married a poor scholar. Who knew that he would end up performing brilliantly, leading to them becoming one of the main residences here. The Fu family is now like a peacock that opened its tail feathers.” First Lady Chen looked displeased. “If that was all, it would have been okay. However, during the last festival, my son caught a glimpse of Lady Rou and had his heart stolen. He stubbornly forced me to ask for her hand in marriage. I could not win against him and thought that I would casually ask for her hand in marriage and have them reject it so that my son could give up. Who knew that they would actually accept the proposal?”

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Du Ning asked.

First Lady Chen spat out, “Nephew, you don’t know Lady Rou. She is famous in our area for being picky and difficult. A few years ago, there were a lot of people that asked for her hand. All of them were rich and respectable, yet she never agreed. It was only later that I understood. She is getting old now and nobody wants her. That is why she agreed to our proposal. She even asked for a betrothal gift of five thousand taels. She is emptying out our family’s fortune. If not for your younger cousin only wanting to marry her and no one else, hmph – Guangzhou’s number one beauty? She is clearly a fox!”

Du Ning did not know how to react. Just then, an old maid ran into the room frantically. She waved a piece of paper as she handed it over to First Lady Chen.

First Lady Chen read the paper as her expression changed. She held the piece of paper in a death grip. “Very good, so she is indeed a fox. She did such an embarrassing thing and has the guts to use our

family to cover up. Hurry and bring Sixth Matchmaker to me!”

Soon, Sixth Matchmaker was brought in. The old maid straightened out the piece of paper and presented it to Sixth Matchmaker.

Sheng Chumu definitely did not want to miss the opportunity as he read the content out loud, “Son of the Chen family...getting married...bought a daughter-in-law...not pure. Huh? Not pure?”

Du Ning froze, “Are they saying...that the bride is not a virgin?”

Sixth Matchmaker was shocked, “This cannot be!”

“You blind and foolish woman, now what should we do?!” A fire blazed in First Lady Chen’s eyes.

Sixth Matchmaker’s eyes flickered as her eyebrows rose. She seemed to have thought of something as she leaned in and whispered into First Lady Chen’s ears. First Lady Chen’s anger immediately dissipated.

Sheng Chumu saw this exchange. *This was getting fun.*

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In front of the Chen family's main entrance, the sound of a suona being played pierced the air as a marriage sedan was lowered to the ground.

The person who came to greet the new bride was not the groom but the First Lady Chen. Her actions were straightforward as she immediately asked for a small temporary tent to be built at the main door.

The sound of the suona stopped as the people around looked at each other in dismay. Amongst them, an impressive looking man stared fervently at the carriage's swaying door curtain. His gaze was expectant.

The Sixth Matchmaker, as she was known by others, mocked, "My bride, there are some debatable rumors about you floating around. For your sake, your mother-in-law wishes to reveal the truth. We have brought an old servant to check you out before you can enter."

Ziyun, who had followed the bride over to her new residence, fumed, "Are you purposely trying to bully my lady? My lady has always been upright and honorable. She has nothing to hide!"

Sixth Matchmaker looked back at the First Lady Chen. First Lady Chen looked scornful. "If she is as pure and clean as you claim, why can't we examine her? If you don't go through with the examination,

don't even think about stepping into our door!"

Ziyun argued back, "Why should she!"

Sixth Matchmaker laughed apologetically, "This is also for the bride's own good. If she passes the examination, then everyone will know that she is pure."

Ziyun immediately rebutted, "So if she doesn't go through the examination, does it mean she isn't pure?"

"Ziyun." Fu Rou came out of the carriage, the bright scarlet veil concealing her appearance. Her demeanor was graceful. "I'll go through with the examination."

Fu Rou immediately entered the temporary tent. Everyone stood rooted to the spot as they awaited the results.

Soon, the old servant reappeared. She held back her sleeves, whispering into Sixth Matchmaker's ears. Sixth Matchmaker chuckled and walked up to First Lady Chen. "Congratulations, the bride's body is untouched."

First Lady Chen raised her eyebrows, "Are you sure?"

Sixth Matchmaker wondered why she seemed to detect a hint of disappointment in the First Lady's voice. However, she brushed it aside as she nodded with certainty, "Yes, I am sure."

First Lady Chen snorted softly.

Ziyun helped Fu Rou out of the tent and towards the marriage sedan. Fu Rou acknowledged the urging of the marriage coordinator but did not enter the sedan. Lifting her hand, she suddenly pulled off the red veil covering her face.

Her long black hair fell beside her snow-white face tinted with rouge. Her eyes resembled black gems as her beautiful face seemed to radiate moonlight.

The people gathered in front of the main entrance all gasped in surprise. Behind the door, Sheng Chumu seemed to turn into a fool.

Only the impressive looking young man in the crowd had a hint of longing in his eyes.

Fu Rou was indifferent to all that happened. To everyone's shock, she suddenly turned towards the wall, wanting to smash her head against it.

As if in a matter of life or death, a hand grabbed onto Fu Rou and pulled her back. She felt herself get pulled into something warm. She looked up only to stare right into the person's eyes. It was a pair of deep eyes embedded into a handsome face that was illuminated by the sun. She felt slightly out of it.

Sheng Chumu had rescued Fu Rou. In the past, he was always able to present himself well in front of beauties. This time, however, he could only stare in a daze at the small flower that was falling from Fu Rou's hair. He could hear his heart pounding wildly.

Without giving Sheng Chumu a second glance, Fu Rou pushed Sheng Chumu away and headed back towards the sedan. She instructed them to bring her home.

Sheng Chumu did not look away as he rolled something between his fingers gently. It was the small flower that had fallen out of Fu Rou's hair. He had made up his mind. *A beauty with a personality. As a playboy, how could he not chase her?!*

The next day, the entire city was talking about what had happened at the Chen Residence. Fu Rou's residence had already been cleaned and there were no signs of a wedding.

Second Madam walked into Fu Rou's room. Seeing how clean it was, she became even more sad as she burst into tears.

Fu Rou sat near the window as she focused on sewing. It was as if her crying mother, who was sitting beside her, was simply a house sparrow. It was only when she carefully finished tucking the end of the thread did she pause her needle and lift her head.

"Mother, please don't cry. I will never marry into the Chen family."

Second Madam suddenly spoke sternly, "Are you planning to remain single for the rest of your life?"

Fu Rou's face remained expressionless as the corners of her mouth lifted to let out a small chuckle, "If that is the case, then it is fate. In the past, the marriage with the Yan family also did not go through."

Second Madam's face changed, "The Yan family offended Great General Lu and was destined to be killed. Why would you bring that up? In the past, I rejected their offer for your sake."

"You have really put in a lot of effort for my sake." Fu Rou's eyes became slightly watery, "How did my picture end up in public? How did the nickname Guangzhou's number one beauty come about? It is all because you want a son-in-law with power. You were picky and rejected numerous marriage offers. As a result, people on the streets are calling me arrogant and that not being able to marry is my punishment. Don't think that I am oblivious to all this."

Second Madam took out her handkerchief, intending to help Fu Rou dry her tears. But in the end, she could not bring herself to move and instead scrunched up her handkerchief.

Fu Rou used her sleeves to rub away her tears roughly. Her expression turned cold once again. "Mother, please leave, I am tired."

Second Madam could not say anymore and eventually left. As she was leaving, she bumped into Fu Jun.

"Please help me persuade her, she refuses to listen to me." Second Madam could only pin her hopes onto Fu Jun.

Fu Jun nodded. "Second Madam, rest assured. Rou'er is the kind that can be coaxed but not coerced. She still listens to reason."

Second Madam sighed, "I hope so. I only wish the best for her. If only she could be like you and be happily married."

Fu Jun smiled and sent Second Madam off. She then turned and walked into Fu Rou's residence. Fu Rou stood up to greet her.

Fu Jun kept her smile as she huffed and sat down. "I know you are capable, but I did not think you would do something like this. First, you asked people to go to the streets near the Chen family and paste notes with rumours written on them. You then asked the matchmaker to bring up the idea of examining your body to First Lady Chen. I really don't understand. If you didn't want to marry, why did you agree to the Chen family's marriage proposal in the first place?"

"I want their endowment gift." Fu Rou confessed.

"You!" Fu Jun's mouth gaped open. "Is it worth it?"

"Elder Sister, you are already married so you don't know the financial state of the house. Recently, the sea has not been peaceful and in this year alone, our ships have already been raided twice. Military taxes have been increasing every year and both the dye workshop and the embroidery house have had trouble breaking even. Our Fu family is left with nothing but an empty shelf." Fu Rou threw out a laugh, "When I was praying at the temple, Chen You was disrespectful to me time and again. His mind is filled with nothing but dirty thoughts. I am already being merciful to only ask for five thousand taels."

Fu Jun sighed, "But you can't exchange your own happiness for five thousand taels."

Fu Rou shook her head. "I didn't have a choice." She then handed a letter over.

As Fu Jun read the letter, her expression completely changed. "Didn't Third Brother go to Jiuhua mountain to learn martial arts? How is it possible that he killed someone?"

"The victim's family demanded that we pay five thousand taels, or they will take Third Brother's life. Now that the money has been sent over, Third Brother should be returning home soon." Fu Rou did not elaborate further.

Fu Jun grumbled, "You should have discussed such a huge matter with me. After all, your brother-in-law is now the magistrate of the county."

Fu Rou cut her off, "Brother-in-law has just taken up his new position, how will he get five thousand taels?" Of course, Fu Jun knew this.

"Elder Sister, don't worry about me. I don't intend to marry anyone in this life." Fu Rou stated in a matter of fact.

Fu Jun stood up and walked towards Fu Rou, catching sight of the almost completed embroidery placed on the embroidery rack. It was a picture of an arrogant eagle, soaring through the sky with its wings spread out.

Fu Jun silently sighed, "After all these years, you still haven't forgotten about Yan Zifang."

Fu Rou's body jerked slightly as she clenched her fist. *How could she forget?*

After his entire family met with misfortune, Zifang was left alone and came to rely on them but was rejected by her mother. *How could she forget?*

That day, it was snowing heavily. It looked as if the snow would engulf Zifang's small silhouette in a matter of seconds.

Fu Jun sighed a long sigh once again, "But Yan Zifang is no longer around. He was chased by people from the general's residence and fell into the river and drowned."

"Yes, he is no longer alive." An immense grief radiated from Fu Rou as she stretched out her hand. The tip of her finger ran over the wings of the eagle. "That is why I cannot forget him. Otherwise, no one will remember him anymore."

A commotion suddenly broke out from outside.

"Where is the bride? Tell her to come out immediately!" First Lady Chen's sharp voice was louder than the rooster at daybreak.

Fu Jun was startled and prepared to head outside. However, Fu Rou held her back, her expression not showing any signs of giving in.

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First Lady Chen and the group of people that she brought with her were in the midst of barging in when Second Madam rushed out.

“In-law...” Second Madam did not know what expression to show in order to help calm the First Lady down.

“What a brilliant daughter you have!” First Lady Chen’s eyebrows were knitted and her footsteps closing in. “The marriage sedan was already in front of her husband’s residence, yet she had the audacity to simply leave. I have never seen anyone like her!”

Second Madam summoned her courage and braced herself, “In-law, although my daughter is slightly pampered, she has also been wronged. Before she could even step into her husband’s home, she was forced to go through an examination outside the main entrance, that is...”

First Lady Chen cut her off, “That was for her own good! There were rumours about her floating around. I was generous enough to give her a chance to prove her innocence! But given that this is her first offence, I will let it go. From now on, when she wishes to return, she will have to ask me for permission. There are rules in our Chen family!”

Third Madam hid behind the door as she gleefully watched the scene unfolding in front of her. Watching First Lady Chen criticize Second

Madam, she chuckled quietly, "Amitabha, good. Scold her more!"

Third Madam had just gotten a hold of the book of accounts and was not ready to hand it back.

At this moment, Ziyun and Mo'er appeared, both carrying crescent stools which they placed at the corridor. Fu Rou walked out leisurely with Fu Jun and delicately took a seat on the stool, gesturing for Fu Jun to do the same. Fu Jun frowned as she sent Fu Rou a look indicating to her to stop being so wilful. Fu Rou pretended not to see as she let out a dry cough.

First Lady Chen turned back only to see Fu Rou sitting comfortably and became extremely displeased, "Why are you still sitting there? Let's go."

"Go where?" Fu Rou smiled as she asked.

First Lady Chen huffed, "Of course to the Chen Residence."

"Ah." Fu Rou acted as if she finally understood, "Mother-in-law, you may not know but according to Tang's law (Laws in the Tang dynasty), if a woman is mistreated in her husband's home, she can return to her maiden home. I was still unmarried when you asked to examine my body in front of everyone. I was extremely humiliated. Because of that, I have returned to my maiden home, and no one can say anything about it."

First Lady Chen suppressed her anger. "Okay, even if you were slightly wronged, that is no big deal. I came personally to fetch you and this should be considered as giving you face."

"Mother-in-law, you don't have to trouble yourself, when my grievance subsides, I will return on my own." *That time will never come.*

"Very good, you are invaluable and cannot suffer even a little grievance. Then don't enter my Chen family! I...I reject you as my daughter-in-law!" First Lady Chen was regretting more and more.

"Reject me as your daughter-in-law? What a joke!" Fu Rou stood up, her gaze penetrating, "I wore the red veil, rode the marriage sedan

and went to your residence in front of everyone in Guangzhou. To someone that has already been married out, how can you reject me as you wish?"

"You, you, you..." First Lady Chen stumbled over her words in anger, "I have never met a daughter-in-law as wicked as you. When I get back, the first thing I am going to do is to ask You'er to write a letter of divorce! If I can't reject you, I'll make him get rid of you!"

Fu Rou pretended to be sympathetic. "You really can't get rid of me."

First Lady Chen was stunned.

Fu Rou immediately asked, "What right do you have to get rid of me?"

Once again, First Lady Chen was speechless.

Fu Rou continued, "Based on me disrespecting you?" She then sighed, "But I didn't even get to step into my husband's home, how could I disrespect my parents-in-law? You can be condemned for getting rid of your daughter-in-law for no good reason. Out of the seven reasons [1] for possible divorce, not a single one can be used against me. The people will be the judge on who is right and wrong."

"You! You!" Lady Chen shouted "You!" repeatedly before spitting out, "If you are not going to my residence then return the endowment gift!"

Fu Rou replied calmly, "I am afraid I am going to have to disappoint you. Since I have been married out, I am now only back at my maiden home to rest. No one asks for the bride's endowment gift after taking the bride."

First Lady Chen pointed at Fu Rou, her finger trembling in anger. "You wish to stay in your maiden home, fine. I come to fetch you, yet you refuse to go. In the future, don't you dare to step into the Chen Residence. Don't think for a second that you can swallow my family's five thousand taels. When I gave you the money, I already bought you. Whilst you stay here, if you even dare to behave inappropriately

or ruin our name, I will throw you in a cage and drown you!"

First Lady Chen turned to leave but was held back by Second Madam. Second Madam pleaded, "Please, we can discuss this."

First Lady Chen, however, shook Second Madam's hand off as she glared at Fu Rou. "That's right, I will immediately find You'er a concubine that is obedient and gentle to take care of him. She will be much better than a sly fox like you."

"You can't get a concubine." Fu Rou seemed to stifle her laughter. How unfair would it be if she wanted her daughter-in-law to know her place yet allow her son to indulge.

"You have no business in whether my son gets a concubine!" First Lady Chen bellowed. Everything she said had been repeatedly denied by Fu Rou.

Fu Rou brought up the Tang law once again. "You see, as a new bride, my wedding dress and marriage sedan is still here. For as long as I do not return, our marriage ceremony will be considered incomplete. The law states that as commoners, there is always a master for internal and external affairs. In the month after the official wife marries into the family, the husband is not allowed to take in any concubines. I am doing this for Chen You's sake. If he were to take in a concubine on the exact same day as I marry into the family, he will be marrying his official wife on the same day as his concubine. The punishment for stopping your marriage with a woman so as to marry another is exile."

First Lady Chen wanted to choke. "You! You!"

"Mother-in-law, please don't get angry. Be careful of your health. Everything I say is the truth. If you don't believe me, you can go to the magistrate office to ask my brother-in-law. He is very familiar with Tang laws." Fu Rou was extremely patient as she slowly sat down.

First Lady Chen's eyes rolled to the back of her head and fainted.

Third Madam looked on as First Lady Chen was carried away, her

anger still burning strong within her.

“She is definitely a demon. Even her mother-in-law cannot control her.” Third Madam suddenly stomped her foot. “Is she really going to stay here? I don’t care! I won’t return the book of accounts even if it kills me!”

Old Maid Chang ran around the corner and almost knocked Third Madam over in her hurry.

Third Madam scolded, “Do you want to die?! Why are you panicking!”

“Third Madam, there is a guest.” Old Maid Chang was still out of breath. “It is a young lord.”

Third Madam froze, “What? Where is he from?”

Old Maid Chang replied, “The eldest son of the Duke Lu, Young Lord Sheng.”

Third Madam paused for half a second before running to the front hall.

Sheng Chumu was in the midst of telling Old Master Fu why he was visiting. “I had a nanny with the surname Xi. She treated me extremely well and was like my own mother. When she passed on, she did not have a single relative beside her and asked me for a favour. She requested that if I ever come across someone with the same surname as her in the future, I should treat them as if they were her relatives. She hoped that they would be able to light an incense for her during festivals.”

His servant, Junhui, chimed in, “We heard that the Third Madam from this residence also has the surname Xi. In order to help Nanny Xi, my lord is here to recognize his kin.”

Sheng Chumu could not forget Fu Rou and did his research on the background of those from the Fu Residence. He decided acknowledging a kin from the residence was the easiest way to get closer to Fu Rou.

Third Madam heard this from outside the door, and could not stop grinning. She believed that it was heaven's will for her to have such a useful surname. She quickly entered the room and greeted Sheng Chumu. Her eyes shifted to the table and she saw the numerous gifts that were shining gold. Her eyes glittered.

Third Madam eagerly asked, "Young Lord, may I know the name of your nanny?"

Sheng Chumu thought for a while before answering, "Nanny Xi said that her childhood name was Yanzhi."

Third Madam cried out loud, "Aiya! My uncle lost contact with his daughter in the past. Wasn't her name also Yanzhi? She must be my pitiful older cousin. Elder Sister, we finally have news of you after you left all those years back. My pitiful uncle longed for you till the day he passed."

Sheng Chumu rubbed his nose in order to hide the smile that he was trying to conceal. "Third Madam, please do not be sad. Today, we have found each other. If Nanny Xi were to know of this in the afterlife, she will indeed be very happy."

Third Madam pretended to fake cry as she patted Sheng Chumu's arm. "You don't have to treat me like a stranger. From now on, we are one family. You can call me Third Aunt."

Sheng Chumu improvised, "Third Aunt."

Third Madam exclaimed, "Then you – err –" *She did not know his name.*

Sheng Chumu reacted quickly, "Third Aunt, you can just call me Chumu. The guest inns in this entire city are fully occupied, I am currently troubled on where I should go for the night."

"If you do not mind, we have a few empty rooms..." Third Madam did not even stop to consider the strange circumstance and enthusiastically welcomed him.

This was exactly what he wanted and Sheng Chumu replied, "I don't mind!"

Third Madam's eyes flickered as she turned around and called out, "Auntie Chang, quickly get someone to clean up the guest rooms. Inform the kitchen to prepare a good dinner. Oh yes, hurry and get Young Lady to come out and greet Brother Chumu!"

Sheng Chumu got excited thinking that he was about to meet Fu Rou.

The drizzle came to a halt as the residence bustled with activity. Fu Rou sat by the window, working on her embroidery of an eagle. She turned a deaf ear to the commotion outside.

Ziyun informed her that Third Madam had acknowledged a relative. He was a young lord from a duke family and she had prepared a banquet to celebrate the occasion. Fu Rou found it a little strange but could not be bothered and told Ziyun to close the windows.

All of a sudden, the doors to her room were flung open and a young man walked in. His demeanor resembled Fu Rou. He was tall, well-built and pleasing to the eyes.

Fu Rou immediately shot to her feet and grabbed the feather duster. She headed straight for the young man.

"Fu Tao, you have really outdone yourself this time!" This younger brother of hers had been learning martial arts on Jiuhua mountain. He finally completed his studies and left the mountain when he got into trouble and even caused someone's death. Because of him, Fu Rou had to 'trick' the Chen family for their money.

Fu Tao dodged his sister's feather duster as he pleaded, "Second Sister, let me explain!"

Fu Rou fumed, "You went to Jiuhua mountain to learn martial arts. Was that all for you to have a love rivalry? And you even caused a person's life?"

Fu Tao reacted quickly as he grabbed onto the feather duster. However, Fu Rou's deathly look scared him so much that he hastily let go and could only continue hopping around.

“There was a group of local ruffians. They were bullying a young lady who was forced into becoming a prostitute in order to earn money to bury her father. I could not stand it, that's why...Aiyo!” Fu Tao grimaced as the feather duster whacked his leg, “I merely stood up for her and then the group pounced on me to beat me up. Pitiful me could only return a single punch. Who knew that that scoundrel could not even take a hit? He was the one that smashed a wine jar against my head first. I still have cuts on my head.”

Of course, Fu Rou would not really hit him but simply scolded. “You caused so much trouble and made our family pay the compensation of five thousand taels. You still dare to argue?”

Shouting and wincing, Fu Tao escaped out of her room. When Fu Rou chased after him into the yard, Fu Tao had disappeared. She was angry but she also wanted to laugh. She knew that Fu Tao's personality was pure and good. If not, she would not have gambled with her happiness on the line to help him out.

At this moment, the sound of a flute filled the air. Fu Rou could not help but fall into a slight trance as she tilted her head up to look up at the night sky. Fu Rou's features were illuminated by the moonlight.

“Yan Zifang, is that you?” *Was she mistaken?*

Fu Rou sighed softly at the moon, “If that really is you, please give me a reply.”

The man behind the fake mountain stared fixedly at Fu Rou and eventually imitated an eagle, giving out several ‘hoots’ in response.

Under the moonlight, traces of emotions flicked in Fu Rou's eyes as an innocent smile appeared on her face. “Do you remember that eagle from before? You caught it for me to play.”

The eagle hooted once again.

“We have played together ever since we were young. So many years have passed, and you have never once visited me in my dreams. Why have you thought of me today?” Fu Rou's expression was dreamlike.

“If it is because of the wedding, you can rest assured. I will not go to the Chen Residence and I will not marry anyone else in the future. Around me, there are only incompetent people that lust for beauty. Perhaps there are really men who are well-rounded in both literature and martial arts, but I, Fu Rou, will not have a chance to meet them.”

“Ah ah ah!” Sheng Chumu fell down in front of Fu Rou. His limbs splayed out.

“Who are you?!” Fu Rou was stunned as she quickly backed off.

1. The seven acceptable reasons in Ancient China for divorce include: disrespect to parents, no children, wanton, jealousy, having a foul disease, being too talkative or stealing.

Court Lady

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“My lord, did you manage to see it?” Junhui was loyal and quickly rushed out to help him get out of this sticky situation.

“Keep quiet.” Sheng Chumu thought Junhui was asking if he had seen Fu Rou and quickly shushed him.

“See what?” Fu Rou assessed the tree before looking at the wall in her garden. She became suspicious.

Junhui answered, “My lord was star gazing, he does this every day.” While he helped Sheng Chumu up, Junhui gave him an eye signal. “You said that the Great Star will shift towards the south tonight and you had to climb the tree in order to see it properly. So, did you manage to see it?”

Sheng Chumu came to a sudden realisation. “Oh! The Great Star, of course it has shifted, but the shift is not very obvious. If you don’t focus, you won’t be able to tell the difference.”

Fu Rou believed him slightly, “You know how to read constellations?”

Sheng Chumu pretended to be humble, “I know a little. The Duke Lu is a family of generals. We lead troops to war, so we have to know geography. As they say, stars guide us in the night and the sun guides us in the day. If ever there is an obscure day, then we will use the

south-pointer.”

Fu Rou suddenly came to a realization. “Oh, you are the relative that Third Madam acknowledged today.”

Sheng Chumu bowed, “My name is Sheng Chumu, I apologise for scaring you, Lady Rou.”

Fu Rou was astonished, “How do you know my name?”

Sheng Chumu reminded her, “We met yesterday, in front of the Chen Residence.”

Fu Rou remembered and thought that it was too coincidental.

“Here’s your flower.” Sheng Chumu thought that he was pretty suave as he took out a fresh flower.

“A fresh flower will wither once it leaves its stalk. This flower is vibrant and fresh, it is not my flower.” Fu Rou did not take it. She then turned and headed back into her courtyard, closing the door.

Sheng Chumu was slightly disappointed as he watched her head in.

Junhui assessed his performance and gave a thumbs up. “My lord, your performance is so much better this time. You are much cooler than when you tried to attract Lord He’s daughter.”

“Really? Was I cooler?” Sheng Chumu immediately became cheerful as he grabbed onto Junhui’s hands and jumped up and down.

The courtyard door suddenly opened and Fu Rou walked out. Sheng Chumu and Junhui quickly hid their smiles and pretended to be serious.

“Young Lord, in the future, if you wish to see the stars, please do it further away from my garden.” Fu Rou said coldly as she stood at the door.

Sheng Chumu casually rebutted, “This tree is the tallest in the entire Fu Residence.”

However, Fu Rou did not wait for him to finish before shutting the door on him.

Junhui stole a look at Sheng Chumu. However, Sheng Chumu was still delighted, he rubbed his hands together looking like he was not going to give up. The both of them chatted and discussed their next step.

No one noticed that there was a man behind the fake stone mountain.

That man was the one that was staring at Fu Rou in front of the Chen Residence. He held an eagle flute tightly in his hands. A frown was etched into his handsome face, he seemed to be annoyed at himself for being a step behind again.

Eventually, he sighed and left.

Although Fu Rou missed the banquet the previous night, their family held another banquet the following afternoon. She didn't know what excuse Third Madam gave, but this time, Fu Rou was invited. Fu Rou typically did not like to join social gatherings, however, she agreed to go as she thought of Sheng Chumu. It was the first time someone had given her flowers. While he might seem a little too eager, at least he was somewhat sincere.

When Fu Rou reached the rear garden, she saw that her father, First Madam, her mother and Third Madam were all present. Third Madam's side of the family, Fu Tao and her youngest sister, Fu Yin, were sitting beside their mother. Other than the selfish Third Madam, Fu Rou got along well with the rest of them. Fu Tao was the carefree casual type, while Fu Yin's looks and personality was obedient and cute; they were completely different from the cunning Third Madam.

As soon as Fu Rou entered the pavilion, Sheng Chumu was immediately energized.

Third Madam had been enthusiastically trying to talk to Sheng Chumu. When she saw his reaction, she found it strange, only to turn her head and see that it was Fu Rou. She plastered on a fake smile.

"Oh, our busy woman is here." The sourness in Third Madam's voice was apparent.

Fu Rou ignored her, paying her respects to her father. "Father, I went to the dye workshop this morning. There were some changes that had to be made to the colour of the dye pond. I have altered the formula and will get someone to send it to you later on. There is nothing much going on at the embroidery house. A few of the new seamstresses are quite good and pick up very quickly."

"I don't have to go over it. You can just make the decision." Father Fu was extremely confident in his second daughter's abilities.

The Fu family managed a dye workshop and an embroidery house in Guangzhou. Although they were not extremely rich, they had no trouble feeding themselves and buying clothes. Fu Rou was talented in embroidery and dyeing, so ever since she took over, the business became even better.

"It must be difficult on you, Rou'er. You are already married, yet you have to worry about your maiden family." Only Third Madam was unhappy.

Fu Tao sang the opposite tune from his mother. "Second Sister is the best. With her around, there is no need to worry about the dye workshop or the embroidery house." Third Madam secretly pinched Fu Tao. However, Fu Tao's skin was thick and he was not afraid of pinches.

"Rou'er, this is the relative that your Third Madam recently acknowledge. He is the eldest son of the Duke Lu, Young Lord Sheng." Second Madam also had a motive but considered the larger picture. All she wanted was for her daughter to marry into a good family. "Aren't you going to greet him?"

"Please don't treat me as a stranger. You can just call me Brother Chumu like Sister Fu Yin does." Sheng Chumu was happy that the topic had finally switched to him and revealed a brilliant smile.

"Young Lord." Fu Rou ignored him as she greeted him distantly.

At this moment, Fu Jun and her husband Xu Youtong entered the yard. From afar, Xu Youtong stared at Sheng Chumu. He quickened his pace and entered the pavilion. All of a sudden, he gave a formal bow and greeting.

Sheng Chumu found out that Fu Jun's husband, Xu Youtong, was the new magistrate of Guang county. He expressed that as a family, they need not be so polite.

Xu Youtong, however, ran beside Sheng Chumu and held onto the wine jar, intending to serve him.

Fu Jun was slightly awkward. Fu Rou pulled Fu Jun to sit with her, conveniently separating herself from Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu did not care as he picked up a piece of sweet and sour pork with his chopsticks. Stretching past Fu Jun, he placed it into Fu Rou's bowl. "Take this as an apology from me for startling you the other night."

With this, everyone's attention was on Fu Rou. Fu Rou did not think that Sheng Chumu would bring this up in front of everyone and was extremely uncomfortable. She could neither agree nor disagree.

Fu Jun could sense how uncomfortable Fu Rou was and changed the topic to get everyone's attention. "I am sorry we were late, what were you guys talking about?"

First Madam brought up how Sheng Chumu was good in martial arts and was even praised by the empress before. Junhui took the chance to praise him and everyone echoed after him.

The way Fu Rou looked at Sheng Chumu changed slightly. Initially, she had thought that he was a lecher and what he said about reading the constellations was just a pretext. But if even the empress has praised him before, then he must be the real deal.

Sheng Chumu recalled Fu Rou mentioning that she liked guys who were well-rounded and thought that he finally had a chance.

"It might sound arrogant so I can't say that I am able to beat everyone in the royal palace. But I have just been trained by a few of

the top experts and practice diligently every day.”

Junhui mirrored him, “My lord, you are too modest. Even the emperor said that you are a tiger among generals. Since you are in a good mood today, how about you show us something?”

Old Master Fu disagreed, “How can we do that? Young Lord Sheng is so precious...”

“No worries, I am willing to perform a sword dance in order to entertain everyone.”

In order to win the approval of the beautiful lady, Sheng Chumu was willing to do anything.

“A sword dance is considered skill?” Fu Tao scoffed, “How about exchanging blows with me instead?”

Sheng Chumu hesitated, “A sword has no eyes, it won’t be good if I accidentally injure you.”

“Then we can use a rod. I have been looking forward to seeing the rod technique that has been passed down in the Duke Lu’s family. Furthermore, my skin is very thick. I will be able to take a few of your hits. But if you are injured, you cannot blame it on me. Do you dare to accept my challenge?”

From the corners of his eyes, Sheng Chumu could see Fu Rou’s gaze focused on him and he automatically responded, “Why not?”

Very soon, the two men held rods in their hands and stood outside the pavilion. Sheng Chumu circled around Fu Tao as they both started towards each other simultaneously. Sand and stones flew in the air as a strong wind rose.

Fu Tao assessed him seriously for a while and suddenly reached out with his bare hands. He caught Sheng Chumu’s rod and tugged it towards himself, pulling his other fist back and aiming for the middle of Sheng Chumu’s face.

Sheng Chumu’s eyes rolled to the back of his head. Everyone was stunned.

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Sheng Chumu lay on the bed in a daze. Blood continued to flow from his nose.

Junhui stood by his side, helping him to wipe his nosebleed. He looked at the huge bruise on Sheng Chumu's face and wanted to laugh but did not dare. His lord really dared to say anything and do anything, in order to chase a girl. He had such little ability but stubbornly wanted to fight someone that had trained in the Jiuhua mountains. Of course, he would be destroyed.

"Serves you right. You know you obviously can't beat him, but you still agreed to fight. Great, now you were knocked out in a single blow. What an embarrassment." Du Ning said exactly what Junhui was thinking.

Sheng Chumu grumbled, "How was I to know Fu Tao was being serious? He embarrassed me in front of Fu Rou. I will not forgive him!" He was not angry because he had lost a fight.

Speak of the devil. Third Madam and Xu Youtong were in the midst of dragging the stubborn Fu Tao over. Third Madam looked extremely apologetic. On the other hand, Xu Youtong seemed to want to claim credit as he boasted about how he had to persuade Fu Tao to come over and apologise.

"We agreed before the fight that if he got injured, he can't blame me.

What kind of young lord is he if he doesn't keep his promises? He doesn't even count as a man!" Fu Tao refused to accept this.

"You!" Sheng Chumu fumed. *So what if this brat was good at martial arts? Was it impressive? He was the son of Duke Lu!*

"How dare you talk back? Hurry up and kneel down!" Third Madam was afraid of losing this valuable relative and hit her son's back with all her might, even pretending to cry. "You are not going to kneel? Okay then you won't have me as your mother. I might as well die!"

Fu Tao was tough on the outside but soft on the inside. Even though he really did not want to, he had no choice but to kneel.

Du Ning suddenly let out two dry coughs. Following Du Ning's gaze, Sheng Chumu looked towards the door and saw Fu Rou about to walk in with Ziyun. In a frenzy, he hopped off the bed and immediately held onto Fu Tao, who was getting ready to kneel.

Sheng Chumu declared out loud, "Brother Tao, there is no need! We had a fair fight and victory belongs to whoever was stronger. Today, I have lost. In the future, you can't be petty when I defeat you." Emitting heroic spirit, he exerted his strength and hit Fu Tao's chest twice, as a way of venting his anger. "Ha ha!"

With the exception of Du Ning, everyone in the room was stunned.

"You aren't going to conspire against me, right?" Fu Tao was still confused. Just a moment ago, Sheng Chumu's entire face was black. In a split second, he had completely changed.

"I hardly got to know you, Brother Tao. Of course, you wouldn't know what I am like. I am not the kind of person to flaunt and step over others just because of my family background." Sheng Chumu wore a sincere expression as he grabbed onto Fu Tao's hands. He patted Fu Tao's hands, putting strength into it, as a way of getting 'revenge'.

"You really don't blame me?" Unlike Sheng Chumu, who could put on an act, Fu Tao had a genuine nature and started to believe him.

"Of course!" Sheng Chumu smiled, "I can only blame myself for being

too careless. I always thought that all the martial arts experts were in the palace. Never would I imagine that there are such powerful experts among the people too. If Brother Tao would allow, I wish to learn how to punch from you.”

“Fine. You do things uprightly and are direct. I am willing to teach you.” Fu Tao agreed.

Third Madam and Xu Youtong finally relaxed.

Seeing the relaxed scene in the room, Fu Rou turned and left quietly with Ziyun. In her naivety, she reflected on her own narrow-mindedness. In the beginning, she had believed that someone like Sheng Chumu, who came from a powerful family, would be dishonest and lazy. Who would have known that he would be so magnanimous and tolerant?

Ziyun assessed Fu Rou’s expression. “It has been a while since I saw you smile so happily.”

Fu Rou froze as she covered her face, a blush taking over. Humorous, kind, proud but not arrogant. He was even magnanimous. It was as if heaven had granted her wish and dropped this man from the tree in front of her.

Fu Rou lowered her guard and Sheng Chumu, who spent his days around her, could sense it. In the following days, Sheng Chumu gave it his all. He knew that every day, Fu Rou would always go to a corner of the garden to do her embroidery. So, he dragged Fu Tao to learn martial arts near her, intentionally removing his shirt. An act!

He knew that Fu Rou liked men who were good at both literature and martial arts. So, he intentionally reads a book near the front door of Fu Rou’s garden. Another act! He knew that Fu Rou always passed by the pavilion when she left her courtyard. So, he got the guards to pretend to fight, making it seem as if he was unrivalled as he beat them. Yet, another act!

However, he couldn’t keep up the act for long and the real test was about to come. Previously, Sheng Chumu had boasted about his calligraphy skills. Therefore, Fu Yin had dragged Fu Rou along to

learn from him.

Sheng Chumu secretly cried for help. With his little knowledge, it would already be considered an achievement if he could read aloud without getting the characters incorrect. He has never practiced his calligraphy before. But of course, he couldn't say that in front of Fu Rou and had to act confident.

Junhui took his time to prepare the materials. He slowly spread out the paper and grinded the ink. Lastly, he dipped the brush in. He looked worriedly at Sheng Chumu's blank face. Junhui wondered if he should try to stall for more time.

Sheng Chumo took a deep breath as he moved the brush swiftly over the paper.

There were four large characters written over the paper: 自强不息 (To strive for self-improvement)

Junhui's lips formed a O. He could not help but shake his head in admiration. *What was the saying - It takes ten years to polish a sword? His young master was a fine example of what it means to take ten years to write four characters!*

Fu Yin was impressed. "It is very well written."

Sheng Chumu had the audacity to say, "One should keep on striving for self-improvement. For as long as we live, we have to work hard and never be lazy."

Fu Rou looked admiringly at the beautiful calligraphy. "Young Lord makes a lot of sense. Humans have only one life, we shouldn't waste our time. It is a pity that so many young nobles do not have the same resolve as you do. They spend their days indulging in alcohol, ladies and other vices, becoming hedonistic."

Sheng Chumu forced himself to swallow and smiled to hide the truth, "I hate hedonistic young nobles the most. They don't repay their country and only know how to play around. I always use these four characters to remind myself that I cannot just enjoy the shade that my father has provided for me but have to keep moving forward."

Fu Rou lifted her eyes and coincidentally locked gazes with Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu smiled warmly at Fu Rou. Fu Rou blushed as she averted her eyes.

Fu Yin did not seem to notice the exchange between the two, “Brother Chumu, your words are very beautiful. Quick, help me write a pair of verses so I can bring it to show my father.”

Sheng Chumu silently cursed as he ran out of tricks. “This... ”

Junhui smartly intercepted, “Characters can’t be written randomly. Calligraphy is a study that cultivates one’s moral character. Didn’t you want to learn calligraphy? You have to first start by learning these characters. The shape, feel and meaning...don’t you think that there is a lot of knowledge in these characters?”

Fu Yin nodded dumbly. Sheng Chumu carried on, “You should first ponder over these four characters. Once you truly understand, I will teach you others.”

Fu Yin held the piece of paper that had the four characters written on it. Satisfied, she left the room.

Fu Rou hesitated, “Can I...”

Sheng Chumu became nervous. “What?”

Fu Rou was slightly timid. “I want a written scroll as well.”

Sheng Chumu froze. Junhui secretly tugged at Sheng Chumu’s sleeve.

Sheng Chumu seemed to regain his consciousness as he was surprised and happy at the same time. His brush flew across the paper as he finished. It was the same four characters.

Sheng Chumu personally handed it over to Fu Rou, “For you.”

“Thank you.” Fu Rou accepted it happily. She walked over to the window and admired it.

Junhui pretended to pack up as he muttered to Sheng Chumu, “Congratulations, you have managed to move Lady Fu Rou.”

Sheng Chumu muttered back, “When Master punishes me, he always forces me to write (自强不息) strive for self-improvement. After writing a thousand times, I can’t believe I actually used it to move someone. Worth it, so worth it!”

Junhui smiled non-stop. “That’s right. The only calligraphy Young Master is good at are these four characters.”

Sheng Chumu glared at Junhui. Junhui immediately shut his mouth.

Who knew that the test today did not end there. Fu Tao ran in hurriedly. He had just gotten a military book but could not understand its contents. He wasn’t sure if Sheng Chumu understood and asked if he could teach him.

Sheng Chumu had wanted to pretend to be humble and slip away. However, Fu Rou said, “How can a general’s son not understand the art of war?” And he immediately braced himself as he declared that he could. He took the book and pretended to be focused on reading it. In reality, his mind was just a straight black line. Other than the book title < < Wei Liaozi > >, he was completely unable to understand the contents of the book.

“Are you confused after reading < < Wei Liaozi > >?” Thankfully, Sheng Chumu was quick-witted.

“How did you know I was reading < < Wei Liaozi > >? You really know everything. I found the right person.” Fu Tao was foolish.

“No wonder.” Sheng Chumu pretended to ponder hard. “Everything has a sequence. A young child has to first learn to hold a brush before they can learn to write. You have just started learning military tactics and have yet to learn the steps but are trying to run.”

Fu Tao replied with “Oh”.

“When it comes to military books, Sun Tzu should be the first. In his book, he writes about all the basics of war. How to act as a general, how to lead your troops, how to arrange formations. Have you read ‘The Art of War’?” Sheng Chumu held his breath as he prayed for heaven to help him.

"I haven't." Fu Tao shook his head.

Sheng Chumu's eyes glimmered, "No wonder. You have messed up the reading of a good book like < <Wei Liaozi> >."

Carrying on, Sheng Chumu expressed his opinion on how Fu Tao should first start by reading < <Sun Tzu> > before moving on to < <Mozi> >. Once he has thoroughly understood those, then he can continue onto < <Wei Liaozi> >.

Respect shone in Fu Tao's eyes. "Brother Chumu, you make a lot of sense. You must have read 'The Art of War' before, right?"

Sheng Chumu could not confess that he has only ever heard of the name and resorted to smiling.

Fu Rou, who had been listening, immediately interjected, "Of course, Brother Tao. Since Young Lord is so well-read in military tactics, he would have definitely learnt 'The Art of War' and must be extremely good at it." She looked back at Sheng Chumu and smiled.

Sheng Chumu seemed to lose his soul as he nodded.

Fu Tao clapped his hands. "Oh right, Brother Chumu, you should be my teacher."

Fu Rou's look of anticipation made the overconfident Sheng Chumu proceed to boast, "Of course, I will teach you!"

Fu Rou was extremely happy, thinking that there was finally someone who could help her restrain Fu Tao's wild temperament. She ordered Ziyun to bring a bottle of wine to officially thank Sheng Chumu for agreeing to teach Fu Tao.

"I have conditions for teaching him." *If he did not take advantage of the situation now, when would he?* Sheng Chumu pounced on the opportunity.

Court Lady

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“As long as you are able to guide my third brother, I will do my best to repay your kindness.” Fu Rou did not consider further.

“First, you are no longer allowed to call me Young Lord, you have to call me by my name.” Sheng Chumu wanted a more intimate address.

“Okay.” Fu Rou did not think it was difficult.

“Secondly, make me fragrant.” Sheng Chumu slipped up.

“What?” Fu Rou’s eyes hardened. *Did she hear wrongly?*

“Err...err...I meant to say that you should help me sew a fragrance pouch.” Sheng Chumu was crying internally, he almost treated Fu Rou as one of the wild girls back in Chang'an.

“A fragrance pouch?” Fu Rou was slightly hesitant. A fragrance pouch was a woman’s item and its significance was different when it came to men.

“Why? I taught you calligraphy and will be teaching your third brother military tactics. Isn’t that worth at least a fragrance pouch?” Sheng Chumu was not compromising on this.

“Okay.” *For her brother’s future, she will think of it as giving it to a*

relative. “I will give you a fragrance pouch.”

“You have to personally make it. It has to be like the flower I gave you the other day.” Sheng Chumu was asking for more.

Fu Rou did not say anything more as her gaze deepened. She was trying to suppress a smile.

Alas, upon returning to his room, Sheng Chumu started pacing in circles.

These few days, as he witnessed Fu Rou becoming more sure of him, he started to struggle internally. Fu Rou liked a man that sought improvement, was good at both literal and martial arts and was upright. He was, however, a hedonist which is the kind that Fu Rou hated the most. As the time they spent together grew longer, he did not know how much longer he could keep up the act.

Du Ning looked at Sheng Chumu, who was pacing in circles, like an ant in a heated pan. *Has this good old friend of his gone too far in order to woo a girl? Not only did his friend come to live in the Fu Residence, he was frantically trying to improve his calligraphy as well as crafting poems. He even practiced martial arts three times a day. If this goes on, he will really be all-rounded.*

Sheng Chumu suddenly raised his fists towards the sky. “I will not be a hedonistic noble! I will do my best to become the guy of her dreams and win her admiration. I will be an all-rounder good in literature and martial arts!”

Du Ning drank his tea calmly and tried not to laugh. “Since you are so determined, you should really persevere all the way.”

Sheng Chumu dashed towards Du Ning and got down on his knees. He stretched his arms out as he begged pitifully, “I can’t pretend any longer. I have used all my tricks. This is all because of Fu Tao, that brat. He is the one that is adamant in me teaching him military tactics. You are well aware that I am hardly capable of anything, how am I supposed to teach him military tactics? If I make a mistake, all

my effort in creating a good image of myself in front of Rou'er...will be for nothing."

Du Ning thought solemnly. "If you are really determined to work hard, I know an exceptional master that teaches military tactics. He stays just outside the city."

Sheng Chumu's eyes lit up. "Who?"

Du Ning suppressed his laughter. "Your uncle, Niu Wudi."

Sheng Chumu ran towards a wall, looking as if he had decided he was going to turn into a lizard and live on the wall. "That king of hell? I won't go to him even if you kill me!"

Not only was Niu Wudi Sheng Chumu's uncle, he was also his nightmare. When he was younger and knew less, he had once tried to learn martial arts from Niu Wudi and almost lost his life. Whatever semblance of martial arts that Sheng Chumu had now was the remnants of his training with Niu Wudi long ago.

"Up to you." Du Ning could not be bothered. "The only thing to lose is your good image. However, it doesn't matter. There are so many beautiful ladies in the world. You don't need to have Rou'er."

Sheng Chumu jabbed his finger at the tip of Du Ning's nose. "Don't think I will fall for your trick! That old geezer is crazy. He blabbered that I was talented and wanted to force me into becoming his disciple. He almost killed me. If I walk into his trap one more time, I will be the biggest pig head in the entire Chang'an!"

Du Ning simply shrugged.

Sheng Chumu grabbed his head and squatted. After thinking for a long while, he suddenly hopped up, extremely agitated.

"So what if you are a pig head?" Du Ning knew Sheng Chumu too well. It was true that Sheng Chumu would not fall for his tricks, but Sheng Chumu could not get past the beauty trap.

"So what if I am a pig head!" Sheng Chumu gritted his teeth as he headed out. "With this trip of mine, I will let Rou'er see how much

one can change in a short time.”

“That’s not right. It is more of turning lies into reality and not letting one see through your disguise.” Du Ning wanted to laugh.

Sheng Chumu pretended not to hear as he ran out of the room.

Wudi Manor was located deep into the mountain ranges. As Niu Wudi was old and had withdrawn from the world, there was hardly anyone living near him.

When Sheng Chumu first set out, he already wanted to chicken out. As the place got more desolated as he headed in, his stomach clenched and he wanted to return so badly. However, as he thought of the look of admiration that Fu Rou would give him, he persevered and appeared in front of Niu Wudi.

Niu Wudi was wheelchair-bound. His legs had been crippled after spending years on the battlefield with Sheng Xiaojing. However, he did not look dispirited. On the contrary, his eyes were filled with vigor as his shoulders and arms were muscular. It looked as if he could jump out of his wheelchair and fight at any moment.

Sheng Chumu forced himself to appear confident as he explained why he wanted to learn military tactics.

Niu Wudi shook his head slowly, “Back then, I offended your elder sister when I attempted to teach you military tactics. I was even thrown out of the residence and had to shift to this deserted mountain to spend my remaining days. You should leave. Don’t treat me like a joke.”

Sheng Chumu pushed aside the two buff men that had stepped up to him as he cupped his hands politely and said sincerely, “Back then, I was young and immature. I did not understand your good intentions at the time. But now, I have reflected. Please teach me military strategy and tactics.”

“So, you truly want to learn?” *Hehe.*

“Truly.” Sheng Chumu did not see the flash in Niu Wudi’s eyes.

“Learning military strategies and tactics is extremely tiring and difficult. Why would you give up your comfortable life and choose this upon yourself?” *It was good to clarify.*

“Of course, it is to bring honour to our ancestors and help our family shine.” Sheng Chumu spoke convincingly.

“Is it because of a woman?” *What rubbish.*

“Mmhm...Uncle, you are very smart.” Sheng Chumu thought about it and gave up on denying.

“You are determined to learn?” *It is no one’s fault if he asked for it.*

“I am determined.” Sheng Chumu suddenly looked up and he caught a small glimpse of the look in Niu Wudi’s eyes.

“You are not afraid of hardship?” *Relax, relax, pretend to be relaxed.*

“I am not afraid.” Sheng Chumu could sense the joy in Niu Wudi’s voice.

“You really...won’t regret?” Niu wudi shot a look at the two burly men beside Sheng Chumu. The two split up as one shifted closer to Sheng Chumu while the other shifted in the direction of the main door.

“Wait, let me reconsider.” Sheng Chumu suddenly realised something was wrong as he forced a laugh and assessed his surroundings. He internally cursed as he realised that he was in trouble. “I think I should go back and think about it some more. You don’t have to send me off.” He forgot that he needed to actually be alive in order to be the hero that he imagined himself as in front of Fu Rou.

“Grab him!” Niu Wudi ordered coldly.

Damn it, he made the same mistake! Sheng Chumu stiffened as he ran out but he was blocked by a group of burly men.

“You brat! I have waited so many years and you finally came. How

can you even think of escaping after stepping into my Wudi Manor? Heaven has eyes, I finally have someone to pass on my brilliant tactics to. Hahahaha!”

The front door of the Wudi Manor slammed shut, cutting off Sheng Chumu’s frightened and desperate face from the rest of the world. Only his miserable cries for help as well as Niu Wudi’s crazy laughter could be heard.

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As Fu Jun walked into Fu Rou's room, she saw Fu Rou focused on sewing a fragrance pouch. The red flower on the fragrance pouch looked so real and fresh. The eagle embroidery lay beside her, not having had much progress.

"You are still sewing that? If we talk about embroidery skills, you are famous for being fast and good. Yet, you are taking a few days just to sew a fragrance pouch. Although, the flower does look extremely beautiful."

Fu Rou did not even lift her head as she continued sewing. "I am using the Sun Embroidery's Interleave stitching method. This method hides the holes made by the needle. It will only blend well when many colours are used. By embroidering a waterway, it allows the embroidery to pop out, resembling a real flower."

Fu Jun made an oh sound. Fu Rou sensed that something was off from Fu Jun's voice as she lifted her head to look into Fu Jun's eyes. "Elder Sister, why are you looking at me like that?"

Fu Jun asked, "Hasn't it been several days since that handsome and perfect young lord showed his face?"

"According to Official Lu, he has gone out to settle some matters." Fu Rou seemed to suddenly realise something as she knitted her brows. "Why did you suddenly bring him up?"

Fu Jun took the fragrance pouch, flipping it over to take a look. "If not him... then who is this fragrance pouch for?"

Fu Rou snatched the fragrance pouch back, looking shy and lovable. "I'm not telling you. Did you come for something?"

At this, Fu Jun became serious. "I heard from Ziyun that ever since Third Madam took over the accounts, she has become more demanding towards you. I heard that she even reduced your embroidery threads while she herself continues to behave extravagantly. What are you going to do about it?"

Fu Rou was about to answer when she was interrupted.

The housekeeper panted as he ran into her courtyard. "Second Lady Rou, there's a problem! The dye workshop has ruined the five hundred rolls of blue cloth that the Xu family ordered. It is all...all dyed an off-blue colour!"

Fu Rou laughed as she stood and led Fu Jun out. "Elder Sister, now you can witness for yourself what I am going to do about it."

Fu Jun could not help but feel calm as she followed Fu Rou to the dye workshop.

Beside the dye pond, a sad looking batch of cloths lay, seeming to have lost all energy. It was neither green nor yellow.

Third Madam looked uncomfortable when Fu Rou asked what had happened. It was only when she felt everyone's gazes on her, did she have no choice but to step up to explain.

"It is nothing big. The Xu family requested for a royal blue colour. However, money was tight and indigo was a lot cheaper than woad. So..."

"So, you changed the woad dye in my formula to indigo?" Fu Rou did not bat an eye.

Third Madam straightened up, not wanting to seem guilty. "Now that I am managing the accounts, I have to think of how to help our family save money. How was I to know that this would happen?"

"How much can you save by changing the dye ingredients? On the other hand, how much would it cost to compensate the Xu family?" Fu Rou asked amiably.

As Third Madam calculated, her expression turned sour. "This..."

"I am worrying too much. Since the accounts are under you, I should not bother about this. Third Madam, please handle this situation." Fu Rou signalled that she was going to leave.

Third Madam rushed to stop her. "Rou'er, good Rou'er, you can't do this to me. To begin with, I am not familiar with the family matters. In the time that I helped you manage, I...I have done my utmost best. Quick take the accounts back, don't think of pushing this on me."

Third Madam threw Old Maid Chang a resolute look. Old Maid Chang then shoved the account book into Ziyun's hands as if to dump a hot potato.

Third Madam then claimed, "It is getting late, I need to go back to see if my husband's dinner has been prepared." She quickly left with Old Maid Chang, not sparing a second glance backwards.

The housekeeper asked Fu Rou, "Second Lady, regarding the compensation to the Xu family for the five hundred rolls..."

Fu Rou replied calmly, "Compensate what? Add two hundred and forty grams of turmeric, fifty grams of black acorn and three sticks of purple root to the dye pond. Then throw all the cloth in and soak them for four hours. It should turn out to be a royal blue."

All the workers felt relieved and started carrying out her orders. Fu Jun smiled, "That's good. Now the account book is with you, you will get your embroidery threads and you can continue sewing your fragrance pouch. All that is left is for the young lord to appear."

Fu Rou became shy and slightly anxious, "Don't talk nonsense, who is waiting for him?"

At this moment, in the plaza of Wudi Manor, there was a target

moving actively. A rider rode furiously, cutting through the wind. Arrows shot out continuously and rained down from the sky like shooting stars.

As one incense stick completely burned out, the rider made it out in the nick of time. Landing gently, he took big strides to stand in front of Niu Wudi. Who else was it other than Sheng Chumu!

Wearing a girdle over his lower half and a top that covered only half of his body, Sheng Chumu walked as if he was stepping on clouds. His skin was a deep bronze colour and his eyes cold. He lifted his longbow looking like a completely different person from his past self.

A burly man who had acted as the target reported, "Thirty arrows were shot. Twenty-nine hit the bullseyes. One missed."

Sheng Chumu took off his top. Niu Wudi had instructed that he would get one stroke of the cane for every shot missed.

Piak! A merciless cane struck his already scarred back, adding one more scar.

Sheng Chumu did not make a sound as he wore his shirt once again.

Ever since that day, when his 'crazy' uncle had caught him, he had endured being soaked in a boiling pot of medicinal bath, being forced to memorise military tactics while tied to the back of a running horse and even practicing shooting while hanging upside down in a net. One thing that he learnt was to never beg for mercy. It would just lead to more misery.

"Uncle, test me." Sheng Chumu only had one wish. That was to leave this place as fast as possible. Fu Rou had already taken root in his heart and each passing day without seeing her felt like a year.

"Test again?" Niu Wudi had said before that he would only let Sheng Chumu go when he passes his test. "Have you thought of the consequences of failure?"

"It is just more punishment. I am already used to it." Sheng Chumu twisted his neck and stretched his waist. A single hit from the whip

did not hurt.

“Good lad, you have character.” Niu Wudi was secretly happy.

“Okay! What does it mean to choose for talent?”

Sheng Chumu did not even pause to think. “A good strategist will look for talent and not rely on people. They will be able to select the right person and give them power. During battle, the person with ability...”

Niu Wudi picked up a ruler as he knocked onto Sheng Chumu’s head.

“Did I ask you to memorise? I want you to tell me your opinion!”

Sheng Chumu muttered to himself to control his temper, “To choose talent refers to placing your army in an advantageous position. In the army, there will be stronger and weaker soldiers. They each have their strengths and weaknesses, but as the leader...Ah!”

Despite being bound to a wheelchair, Niu Wudi was not considered short as his aura was frightening. “You are not telling me your opinion but the opinion that I told you last night. Are you a parrot that only knows how to repeat after others? Is this what it means to understand? Is this what it means to ponder? Is this what it means to master a subject?”

Sheng Chumu quickly grabbed onto the ruler that was about to hit him and became serious.

“Advantage can be man-made. When a stone is placed on the floor, is it not much of use. But if it is placed at the edge of a cliff, a single push could kill. This is called advantage. Water can be weak and powerless. But when it is gathered in a river and moves from a high point, the drop in elevation creates a force. The torrential force can then push aside a large stone or even crush a wall. This is also an advantage. When a knife is raised up and slashed downwards, this is also an advantage. When an arrow is nocked and pulled back, it is also an advantage. The difference is that it has yet to be released, an accumulated advantage.”

Niu Wudi’s eyes glimmered. “And?”

Thoughts flooded Sheng Chumu's head. "A narrow mountain pass will occupy a good position. One man will be able to hold the pass against ten thousand enemies. This is what it means to create an advantageous position."

"And!" *Good lad!*

"When in a battle, it is important to consider the overall situation. Although the battle is out in the wilderness, the true battle is internal. We must shake the foundation of the enemy. This is what it means to dig out the roots to gain an advantage."

"Good! As a general, you must first know how to create an advantage. Only with power can you use it favourably. And!" *Not bad, not bad!*

"As a last resort, to gain an upper hand, placing your soldiers in a life or death situation will force them to fight for survival."

"And!" *He was simply burning!*

"I am done. Did I pass?"

"Mmhm..." *He still wasn't completely satisfied!*

"Uncle, as a general, you have to keep to your word."

Niu Wudi eventually nodded. He turned and watched as Sheng Chumu dashed off, as if he was afraid that he would change his mind. Niu Wudi could not help but laugh. He was not going to use the same strategy twice. This time, he had set up a long line to catch the big fish. If Sheng Chumu really wanted to protect the woman he loved, he will eventually realise that he needed to come back to learn more!

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Sheng Chumu was back!

When Ziyun told Fu Rou the news, Fu Rou was filled with happiness. When she finally focused on the present, she realised that she was seated in front of her dresser. As she delicately drew her eyebrows, she was shocked to realise that she started to care so much about Sheng Chumu. Just the thought of finally seeing him had thrown her into a frenzy.

Fu Rou had never been the type to spend much time dolling herself up. Today, however, she took quite a while before she was finally ready. She then asked Ziyun to get a box, and placed the fragrance pouch in it. She personally held the box as she left her courtyard.

As she turned the corner, she saw Sheng Chumu talking and laughing with Fu Tao. However, Fu Rou suddenly halted her steps as her heart sped up. She hid behind a pillar while she secretly watched him. Sheng Chumu's clothes were as magnificent as before but his robe seemed tighter and more filled now. Fu Rou couldn't help but think of Fu Tao. Back when he had left for Jiuhua Mountain, he was as skinny as a monkey. However, when he returned, he became bigger and more muscular as if he was a different person.

Fu Rou became curious as she subconsciously walked out from behind the pillar, wanting to ask Sheng Chumu where he had been.

The moment Sheng Chumu caught sight of Fu Rou, his mind went blank and he went up to her enthusiastically.

Fu Tao smiled warmly. "Second Sister, what took you so long? Teacher has already finished talking about the Art of War's fire attack."

Fu Rou greeted, "Young Lord. Thank you for taking time to teach Fu Tao." As she faced Sheng Chumu, she forgot what she was supposed to say.

"You are still calling me Young Lord?" Sheng Chumu stared at her, not wanting to shift his gaze away from Fu Rou. One day of not seeing her felt like three seasons had passed.

"Sheng Chumu." Fu Rou tried her best to sound natural.

"Who calls someone with their surname?" Sheng Chumu did not allow her to get away with it.

".....Chumu." Fu Rou fidgeted, blushing slightly.

"Where is my fragrance pouch?" Sheng Chumu spread out his palm.

Fu Rou handed the box over to him. Sheng Chumu opened the box carefully. He could not help but reach out to touch it as he saw the intricate embroidery on the fragrance pouch and the flower that looked practically real.

"Although I have heard from your mother that you are excellent in embroidery, I never thought that your embroidery would be so beautiful. I am afraid that even the palace's embroideries pale in comparison to yours."

Fu Tao came over and looked into the box. He wanted to reach in, only to have it slapped away by Sheng Chumu.

"Second Sister, you are biased. This fragrance pouch is so much nicer than the one you gave me." Fu Tao suddenly noticed, "Eh, why are there thorns on this flower?"

There was a deeper meaning behind Fu Rou's words. "Although

flowers are beautiful, their thorns can hurt you.”

Sheng Chumu carefully tied the fragrance pouch onto his belt. “I don’t care if it hurts me. I am not afraid of pain and I like excitement.”

Fu Rou lowered her head to hide her smile as she turned and left.

Sheng Chumu stared at Fu Rou’s back view, only stopping when Fu Tao hit his back. “Teacher, the fifteenth of next month is my Second Sister’s birthday.” Fu Tao winked.

“Then what are we waiting for?” Sheng Chumu pulled Fu Tao along. “Let’s go get a present!”

Fu Tao brought Sheng Chumu to the most exciting street in the city. Both sides of the streets were filled with Guangzhou’s famous stores. There were also numerous small stalls. The coastal areas were prosperous as ships, transporting goods, could be seen all around the area. There were even thick-bearded and blue-eyed merchants amongst the crowd.

“Teacher, how is it? Isn’t our Guangzhou exciting?” Fu Tao had thought that Sheng Chumu would find this new.

“If you are not at home, you are in the mountains. You haven’t seen much of the world.” Sheng Chumu looked proud. “Only when you get to Chang’an will you understand why it is the number one city in the world.”

“Then can you bring me to Chang’an to take a look?” Fu Tao could not help but express his interest.

“No problem, we are a family after all.” As Sheng Chumu said this, he suddenly realised how serious he was about Fu Rou and started to harbour thoughts of marrying her. He could not help but feel slightly fearful but also happy at the same time.

“Teacher, this looks nice. My Second Sister will like this.” Fu Tao could not sense the change in Sheng Chumu’s emotions as he picked

up a hairpin from a stall.

Sheng Chumu glanced at it and immediately expressed disdain. “How can a wooden hairpin be good enough for Rou’er?” He turned and looked around. He saw a jewellery store on the opposite side of the street. The entrance looked grand. “That store looks not bad—”

He had yet to complete his sentence when a horse dashed through the streets. The man on the horse was extremely arrogant as he brandished his whip wildly.

Fu Tao shouted, “Teacher, look there!”

Sheng Chumu saw it too.

A young girl stood in the middle of the streets, having froze in shock. The horse was just about to reach her as it raised its hooves into the air. Sheng Chumu and Fu Tao reacted at the same time, one of them grabbed the young girl while the other grabbed the reins. The horse was shocked as it threw the rider off its back. Sheng Chumu quickly stepped forward and sat on the man. Fu Tao pressed down on one of his arms. The people around them could not help but exclaim in amazement at the teamwork.

“You blind shits! I am the messenger of the Great General Lu!” The rider was rude and unreasonable.

Sheng Chumu beat him up like he was stir-frying chestnuts. “Open your eyes and take a good look at me. I am Sheng Chumu from the Duke Lu [1] Residence!” He did not continue arguing with the rider and moved to the side with Fu Tao after beating him up.

“Sheng Chumu, Sheng Chumu, just you wait!” The messenger’s face was swollen as he crawled up. He grabbed onto his horse and stumbled as he ran away.

Sheng Chumu looked coldly at the rider as he ran away. He remembered that the Lu family lived in Guangzhou. He thought of the saying on how enemies would always meet. Wherever the Sheng family went, they would always bump into the Lu family. But he was not one that was afraid of trouble. He had announced his name for

them to know that if they wanted to seek revenge, they should go straight for him.

“Oh no, if Second Sister knows that I got into a fight, she will definitely not forgive me.” Fu Tao was scared of Fu Rou’s duster.

“To deceive one’s superiors and delude one’s subordinates. That is something a man must learn. Can’t you just hide it from her?” Sheng Chumu believed that the solution was simple. “Come on, that was a good fight. Let me treat you to a drink.”

As his future brother-in-law, it was his responsibility to bring his future younger brother out to see the world. Since he was going to bring Fu Tao to see the world, then they could not simply drink any kind of alcohol. They had to go drink with ladies.

The next day, Sheng Chumu supported Fu Tao, who smelled of alcohol, back to the Fu Residence. The moment he stepped into Fu Tao’s room, he sensed danger. A feather duster flew towards him. His mind immediately cleared as he pushed Fu Tao in.

“You spent the entire night out at the brothel and even sent the bill back home. Fu Tao, are you trying to piss me off?!” Fu Rou was furious. This brat was making them lose money.

Sheng Chumu silently cursed as he hid by the door. Ever since he came to Guangzhou, he had chased Fu Rou, entered the Fu Residence and went to the Wudi Manor to train. It has been a while since he had drunk so happily and he might have gone slightly overboard. He had actually passed out before Fu Tao and forgot to pass on the knowledge of paying for the drinks upfront. Fu Tao, that foolish boy, had actually asked for the bill to be sent to the Fu Residence.

“I only slept there because I was drunk, I didn’t do anything.” Fu Tao covered his head and ran around wildly. At the same time, he disregarded any sense of loyalty as he dragged Sheng Chumu down with him. “Teacher was the one that brought me there!”

Sheng Chumu had wanted to escape but as he heard his name being

called out, he knew he could not run. If he did, wouldn't he make Fu Rou misunderstand his personality? Therefore, he gritted his teeth as he walked into the room and secretly glared at Fu Tao.

Fu Tao dropped everything. "Teacher, help me to pacify my sister." He immediately ran off.

Fu Rou slowed down as she lowered the feather duster. Her fingers, however, tightened. She believed that her own younger brother would not fool around or frame others. She had thought that Sheng Chumu was not a playboy like other men. It seemed like he was no different.

Under Fu Rou's gaze, for the first time in his life, Sheng Chumu felt like a child that had done something bad and he could not raise his head to meet her eyes.

"Yesterday was my fault. I was the one that brought Fu Tao to the brothel. But we only drank, we did not do anything else. If you are angry, just hit me." Actually, he had already toned down.

Fu Rou actually raised the feather duster.

Sheng Chumu shrank his neck and closed his eyes to prepare for impact, but nothing happened. He opened his eyes only to see Fu Rou holding the feather duster back in the proper orientation as she lightly brushed over his robe.

Fu Rou said softly, "A feather duster is used to get rid of dust, not to hit people."

Sheng Chumu grabbed onto the feather duster, holding Fu Rou's hand in his. Fu Rou was startled and immediately wanted to pull away. However, Sheng Chumu grabbed her hand tightly, not wanting to let go. Fu Rou lifted her eyes and gazed into Sheng Chumu's eyes. Her reflection in his eyes was dejected, an image of herself that she has never seen before.

"The brothel is a place where pitiful girls are being humiliated. Why would you go there to drink?" In the end, Fu Rou still wanted to ask.

"The brothel can also be a place for people to have intimate

conversations and compose poetry. It is also a place to drink and have casual conversations. Du Ning loves to go to the brothel. Du Ning says that the girls at the brothel are very pitiful, if we don't visit them, they won't have any customers and won't even be able to feed themselves." Sheng Chumu could only use his friend to help him out of this situation.

"So, you like to go to brothels?" She was extremely afraid that he would say yes.

"No, no! Every time I go, it is to warn those dishonest guys that they are only allowed to drink and not play with the girls."

Fu Rou laughed, "You are too gullible. Do you really think your warning will stop those perverts?"

Sheng Chumu replied wilfully, "I will try my best. In this world, we need some people to stand up for what is right."

"You are right." Fu Rou looked deeply at Sheng Chumu and suddenly put on a bright and cheerful expression. "In this world, we need people to stand up for what is right."

Sheng Chumu looked into Fu Rou's eyes and felt like he had entered another galaxy.

Meanwhile, Du Ning did not know that he had been used as a playboy. Du Ning carried an ink slab in his hands as he was about to turn the corner. A figure suddenly dashed out, knocking into him and causing black ink to spill all over his robe. Du Ning did not mind as he reached out to grab the person's shoulder, helping her to regain her balance.

Although she was normally quiet and calm, Fu Yin was furious at that moment. However, when she saw the black ink all over Du Ning's robe, she became apologetic.

"Brother Lu, I am sorry."

Du Ning accepted her apology graciously. "I am alright, but what happened to you?"

Fu Yin bit onto her lip as she fumed, "It is all because of my mother. Third Brother was hit by Second Sister for going to a brothel and my mother took her anger out on me. She said I –" Her mother scolded her brother for being useless and then scolded her for not being able to seduce Sheng Chumu. However, she obviously couldn't say this. "She scolded me for no reason."

Du Ning advised, "Your mother must have scolded you because she was worried about your brother and became too anxious. Don't take it to heart."

Fu Yin made a small sound of assent. Du Ning smiled and was about to leave.

"Brother Lu, did you prepare the ink to practice calligraphy?" Fu Yin blurted. She needed to find something to do. Du Ning nodded.

"Then can you teach me calligraphy? Brother Chumu had agreed to teach me, but I never seem to be able to find him." *Tsk, the more her mother wants her to get close to Brother Chumu, the more she would avoid him.*

"Chumu was going to teach you? He said that?" Du Ning wanted to laugh.

"Yes, Brother Chumu's words are very beautiful. Even my Second Sister agreed." As Fu Yin saw how Du Ning looked as he laughed, she thought he was extremely handsome.

"He must have written the four characters, 自强不息 (to strive for self-improvement) right?" Du Ning also knew the backstory. Very unfortunately, he had grown up with that said person and attended the same school.

"Oh, Brother Lu you guessed it. You are amazing." Fu Yin was intrigued as her eyes widened. "No matter how good he is, he doesn't teach me. Brother Lu, can you teach me?"

Facing such an 'open-minded and keen' adorable face, Du Ning could not bring himself to say no. So, after agreeing to meet in the study room, Du Ning went to change. When Du Ning finally entered the

study room, Fu Yin unexpectedly lifted a piece of paper with a string of ugly characters, stoically.

“Brother Lu, did you write this?”

Du Ning answered in a spur of a moment. “Nope, it is Chumu—” He almost bit off his own tongue as he suddenly shut his mouth.

Unfortunately, it was too late. Fu Yin was shocked as she heard every word he said.

1. Remember that Duke Lu is a title Sheng Chumu's father received and not their last name

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Fu Rou was embroidering in her own residence as she saw a servant let Chumu in. She did not remember when it started but it had become a daily occurrence for Sheng Chumu to be around her.

Sheng Chumu brought a stool over and leaned near her stool. He looked at Fu Rou.

Fu Rou did not mind him as she coincidentally reached the end of her intricate embroidery. Bending over and lowering her head, she gathered her strings on the rack. A strand of luscious black hair fell from behind her ears. Her neck was white as snow and looked extremely slender. From the side, her powdered cheeks looked like a lotus that had emerged from a pond. It caused Sheng Chumu's heart to palpitate wildly and he could not help but get closer to her. In fact, he got so close that he was about to reach her cheek. Fu Rou turned around as Sheng Chumu quickly shifted his gaze, pretending to examine her needlework.

Fu Rou wanted to laugh. "You are a guy. Are you really interested in my needlework?"

Sheng Chumu immediately replied, "You shouldn't say that. There are three hundred and sixty trades, with a master in each and every trade. Embroidery is also an intricate study. What is wrong with me wanting to learn?"

“Embroidery is also a study?” Fu Rou nodded, “That makes sense. Do you really want to learn?”

Sheng Chumu was not afraid of anything in this world, except for not having a chance to get close to Fu Rou. “If I greet you as my teacher, would you accept me?”

“I won’t accept you. Your fingertips are too big. They are suited for arrows and swords, but they cannot hold a needle. However, if you wish to listen, I can still tell you about it.” Fu Rou pointed at the picture she had just sewn. “I used the Guang embroidery method for this.”

Sheng Chumu pretended to be interested. “Why is it called the Guang embroidery method? Oh, I know. Because we are in Guangzhou, so you used the Guang embroidery method, right?”

“Nonsense.” His answer made Fu Rou laugh and she continued, “It depends on what kind of picture you want to sew. This picture is of an apricot forest in spring, surrounded by swallows. The entire scene is filled at every corner with lush vegetation. Using the Guang embroidery method, the raking stitch, knot stitch and feather stitch are the main stitches that creates the majestic look.”

Sheng Chumu seemed to be enlightened, “I wouldn’t know if you didn’t tell me. It really looks very majestic.” He took the chance to try and ask for more, “Rou’er, help me sew a picture! Mandarin ducks playing in the water! How about that?”

“Didn’t I just sew a fragrance pouch for you?” Fu Rou groaned.

“But you see, I carry this fragrance pouch with me the entire day. If it spoils or becomes old, I will be heartbroken. If you sew another picture for me and make it into a small screen fan, I can leave it in my room.”

“I can sew it for you but not mandarin ducks playing in the water.” Fu Rou thought that it was too tacky. “A scenery picture is the most soothing. How about I sew a picture of the sky and the ocean for you?”

“Okay!” *Anything would do.*

“Then you have to remember to give me the draft picture.”

“Draft?” Sheng Chumu had a bad feeling.

“Without a draft, how am I going to create the embroidery?” Fu Rou had yet to notice Sheng Chumu’s troubled face. “Since you write beautifully, you must draw nicely too.”

“Of course.” Sheng Chumu stuck out his chest as he forced himself to regain his energy. “I promise that the draft will be spirited and encompass the energy of the ocean.”

Fu Rou laughed as she continued to sew. She casually mentioned about concealing stitches. Sheng Chumu found it extremely interesting and asked Fu Rou to explain further. Fu Rou was surprised. Sheng Chumu had a great memory and could easily understand after she had explained only once.

“Rou’er, I have something I want to ask you. You can’t get angry at me.” Seeing that Fu Rou was in a good mood today, Sheng Chumu tried asking.

Fu Rou nodded.

“Who is Yan Zifang?” Seeing Fu Rou’s expression change immediately, Sheng Chumu rushed to explain, “That night, I heard you talking to the moon.”

“Were you actually studying the stars or were you eavesdropping?” Fu Rou suddenly stood up, ignoring Sheng Chumu’s calls. She walked into her courtyard and slammed the door shut.

Sheng Chumu rubbed his nose. *As soon as he mentioned Yan Zifang, Rou’er became furious, there must be something behind this. If Rou’er was not going to tell him, there will be somebody that will.* Sheng Chumu decided to go and look for Fu Yin.

As Sheng Chumu entered Fu Yin’s room, he saw her sitting in front of the table, supporting her chin with her hands and daydreaming. “Sister Yin!”

Fu Yin became aware of her surroundings once more, but when she saw that it was Sheng Chumu, she pursed her lips in disappointment, "Oh, it is you."

Sheng Chumu laughed, "Who were you expecting?"

Fu Yin obviously would not answer him. "You came at the right time. Today, I saw a piece of paper in the study room..." Sheng Chumu, however, cut her off impatiently, "Who is Yan Zifang?"

Fu Yin's face changed, "I don't know."

"You don't know, or you don't want to tell me?" Sheng Chumu could see through her.

"It is Second Sister's story and it is not my place to tell you." Fu Yin chased him away. "You can go ask Second Sister."

Third Madam suddenly stuck her head through the window. "Chumu, I will tell you."

Both Fu Yin and Sheng Chumu jumped in shock. Third Madam walked lightly into the room. "Yan Zifang and Rou'er had a childhood betrothal."

Sheng Chumu felt as if his heart had fallen into a deep abyss. "Then where is Yan Zifang now?"

"He is dead." Third Madam sighed as she shook her head. Sheng Chumu's heart jumped right back onto the surface. "Dead?"

Third Madam finally got a rare chance to gossip as saliva flew out of her mouth. "Fu Rou is a jinx. As soon as they settled the betrothal with the Yan family, their family was completely wiped out. Yan Zifang himself drowned in a river. The Chen family wanted to take her in as their daughter-in-law and look at the miserable state the Chen family is in now. I heard that First Lady Chen's liver hurts every day from the anger she suffered. That's why, our Fu Yin is better. She is pure and innocent. Chumu, don't you agree?"

A gust of wind blew past as Third Madam realised that Sheng Chumu was nowhere to be found. "Eh, where did he go?"

Fu Yin rolled her eyes. Sheng Chumu stuck his head through the window unexpectedly. "Oh right, Sister Yin, what does your Second Sister like?"

Fu Yin answered matter of fact, "She likes embroidery, of course."

Sheng Chumu was dissatisfied. "What kind of embroidery? From which master?"

"Oh." Fu Yin understood, "My Second Sister likes Lady Hui's embroidery the best..." Sheng Chumu nodded sharply and ran off.

"Grandfather gave Second Sister one of Lady Hui's pieces and Second Sister has been taking extremely good care of it. She treats it like the family heirloom. Hey! I'm not done!" Fu Yin sighed before realizing that her mother was glaring at her.

Both of her children were good for nothings! Third Madam was about to die of anger. Her son spends his days around Fu Rou while her daughter is helping to match Fu Rou with Sheng Chumu.

Fu Rou sat by the window. The day had come to an end. The clouds in the sky were dyed red before eventually turning grey.

When Sheng Chumu mentioned Yan Zifang, she suddenly felt extremely confused. When she agreed to marry Chen You, it was out of desperation to solve her family's financial problems. She did not have any feelings and was also not apologetic. But she has been moved by Sheng Chumu and when he suddenly brought up Yan Zifang, she suddenly felt guilty; especially since he was the one that brought him up. All these years, Fu Rou still thought of herself as Yan Zifang's fiancée. However, Sheng Chumu's appearance has caused her to momentarily forget.

"Yan Zifang, are you the one that sent Chumu to me? Are you trying to tell me that there are other guys who are good at both literature and martial arts and have a sense of justice? If so, thank you." Fu Rou mumbled to herself as her emotions cleared up.

As a child, she could not grab onto Yan Zifang's hand. Now, she must

grab onto her own happiness.

Ziyun reported, "Your Second Aunt is here. Master wants you to go over." Fu Rou let out a long breath but plastered a smile on her face as she got up.

As she entered the hall, Fu Rou greeted her Second Aunt and stood quietly by the side, listening to the elders talk. As Third Madam was not paying attention to her, Fu Yin took the chance to move closer to Fu Rou.

"Second Sister, let me tell you something. Brother Lu accidentally let slip that Brother Chumu's calligraphy is actually quite ugly. He only knows how to write those four characters."

Fu Rou froze and frowned, "That's just a hearsay, we can't take it as the truth."

Fu Yin stuck out her tongue.

At this moment, Second Aunt raised her voice, "You all may not know but Chang'an has a lot of hedonistic young nobles. I was afraid that Rong An would learn from them and kept a close watch over him every day. It is only after he got married that I dare to come out."

Fu Yin loved to listen to gossip and her attention immediately shifted. "I know Chang'an has a lot of outstanding officials."

Second Aunt nodded, "That is a little outdated. These years, at least half of Chang'an is made up of hedonists. Chumoliangjian wins over Jinfan." (tl: 处默亮剑盛金帆, it sounds like Chumo takes out his sword and defeats Jinfan in Chinese.)

Fu Rou's heart fell.

"Brother Chumu?" Fu Yin was intrigued, "Chumu's sword play is excellent. Did he win against someone called Jinfan? What has this got to do with hedonists?"

"Eh, that is not what I meant." Second Aunt's expression did not look good. "What that means is that in Chang'an, the three most famous

hedonists are the young lords from the Duke Lu Residence. They are Sheng Chumu, Sheng Chuling and Sheng Chujun. Together, they are known as Chumoliangjian [Note]. As for Jinfan, it refers to a girl from a brothel. In order to make her happy, the three brothers fought to use her embroidered shoes as a cup to drink from. Just the thought of it is disgusting.”

Fu Rou stood up. “I don’t feel well. I am going back to my room to rest.”

Everyone stared at Fu Rou’s sudden departure, not knowing the reason why she left. Only Third Madam’s expression changed as she plastered a smile on her face and beckoned Fu Yin to her. Fu Yin walked over unwillingly.

Third Madam spoke softly, “Shouldn’t you check on why your Second Sister is not feeling well suddenly?”

“Hmm?” Fu Yin found it strange. Third Madam nudged Fu Yin.

As Fu Yin walked into Fu Rou’s chamber, she saw Fu Rou staring blankly at the paper with “自强不息(striving for self-improvement)” written on it.

Fu Yin could not help herself, “Second Sister, I am not spouting nonsense. Brother Chumu really only knows how to write these four characters well. I saw a note written by him and the characters are really ugly.”

Fu Rou shook her head furiously. *No, Chumu wouldn’t lie to her.*

Fu Yin was not completely oblivious to her feelings. “Okay, I won’t say anymore. Now, I am learning calligraphy from Brother Lu. Brother Lu not only writes well; he also draws very well. Last night, he just painted a picture of a setting sun over the ocean. He said that when he frames it up, he will give it to me.”

Fu Rou forced a laugh, “You are so easily bought over with just a painting.”

Fu Yin protested playfully, “Not even. I am seeing the true side of him. On the other hand, Second Sister, you are so smart. Don’t be

fooled by a bunch of sentences from a Chang'an hedonist..."

Fu Rou's expression changed. Fu Yin immediately shut her mouth and took her leave.

Sheng Chumu was not at all concerned about the visit from the Fu family's relatives. He had no idea that one of them knew his exact character. He only knew he was very lucky. Fu Rou was just talking about an ocean pattern and Du Ning happened to have a piece with him. Sheng Chumu stole the picture and was going to plagiarize it as his own. Carrying the scroll, he rushed happily into Fu Rou's garden, calling for her loudly.

As Fu Rou walked out of her courtyard, she said, "Don't shout so loudly, the entire residence can hear you." *Should she ask Chumu about it and hear what he has to say?*

Sheng Chumu assessed her expression and figured that she was no longer angry with him. His emotions relaxed. "You're no longer angry with me?"

Fu Rou said blandly, "I am not so petty. With regard to me and Yan Zifang, it is not like I can't tell you. If you want to know..."

Sheng Chumu hid the fact that he had already found out and pretended to be magnanimous. "The most important thing between people is trust. As long as I trust you, it doesn't matter if it is Yan Zifang, Yan Ziyuan or even Yan Zituoyuan [1]. I don't care." *The person was dead now and was no longer a threat to him!*

Fu Rou had another deeper thought as she repeated, "That's right, trust is the most important thing amongst people..."

Sheng Chumu was busy spreading out the painting and could not sense her intention. "This is the draft you wanted me to draw for the embroidery of an oceanic scenery. How is it?"

"Did you...really draw this?" *Didn't Fu Yin just mention that Du Ning drew a scene of a sunset over the ocean? Chumu also drew the same ocean sunset? Could it be a coincidence?*

"Of course. I am famous in Chang'an for my painting skills. Even my

brother-in-law, Prince Han, praised me.” Sheng Chumu did not need to have a script to talk big.

“I just mentioned it this morning.” Fu Rou said lightly.

“I drew it this afternoon. It was done in one sitting.” Sheng Chumu continued easily.

Fu Rou took the painting and walked to the study room. Sheng Chumu followed her.

Who would have known that the minute Fu Rou entered the study room, she spread the painting onto the table, readied the ink and dipped a brush in. She then held it out for Sheng Chumu.

“What are you doing?” Chumu found it weird.

“Write something.” Fu Rou remained expressionless. “I will sew the characters in as well. How great would that be.”

Sheng Chumu took the brush and was about to write.

“Don’t write striving for self-improvement.” Fu Rou suddenly declared.

Sheng Chumu froze. “Why not?”

“This is a painting of a sunset over the ocean, what has it got to do with self-improvement? Write beautiful day.” Fu Rou was feeling increasingly uncomfortable about the situation.

“Look at this fishing boat, it is catching fish for one’s livelihood. Isn’t that self-improvement? Look at this mew gull, it is flying desperately. Isn’t that also self-improvement? If you want me to write, I will write self-improvement.” Words flew out of Sheng Chumu’s mouth.

“Write beautiful day (风和日丽).” Fu Rou insisted. She wanted to see for herself whether Chumu was a fraud.

“No, I will write striving for self-improvement.” Sheng Chumu desperately tried not to fall into her trap. He did not allow her to argue anymore as he wrote self-improvement on the painting. He still

had the audacity to show-off. “How is it? Doesn’t it match well with the painting?”

Fu Rou looked at him with a complicated expression. Although she had lost all hope, she hesitated for a while before asking, “Do you have any siblings?”

Sheng Chumu had no suspicions as he answered, “I have two younger brothers, Chuling and Chujun. We are very close and often go together to...” He almost slipped up. “To study.”

Fu Rou did not say anything as she turned and left. When she returned to her courtyard, Fu Rou shut the door behind her tightly. If this continued, the only person she would be fooling would be herself. She turned around to face the wall and gazed at the characters that Sheng Chumu had gifted her. The four characters were bold and strong, she had looked at it and associated it with his personality. Who knew—

Fu Rou stared blankly at it for a while before suddenly ripping the paper to shreds.

1. Fang (square), yuan (circle), tuoyuan (oval) in Chinese. It’s a play on words.

Note: Original names from the novel. We are following the names from the drama so there are differences

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A table of delicacies sat in front of him. There was lamb, steamed fish and green leaf noodles. They were dishes that could forever raise Sheng Chumu's appetite and get him to dig in, but they did not work this time.

Wine jars were strewn all over the place.

Du Ning's head ached as he looked at the drunk Sheng Chumu. Ever since he met Fu Rou, this old friend of his was behaving out of the norm. He was actually drinking his sorrows away because of a girl.

"Tell me, what did I do wrong? She wanted a painting, so I gave her a painting. She wanted me to write, I wrote. For her, I willingly let myself get tortured by my uncle who is the king of hell. I learned military tactics, how to ride and shoot. I got scolded and beaten and barely got out alive. Was it easy for me? In the end, as soon as she is not happy, she completely ignores me."

"How did you offend her?" Du Ning thought about how Fu Yin had seen Sheng Chumu's writing. He comforted himself as he thought that it shouldn't be a problem.

"I don't know. Winning over a woman's heart is like trying to dig a needle out from the ocean. Even if I was the Thousand Hand Bodhisattva, I still won't be able to dig hers out. I asked her and she won't tell me. She just pulled a long face and stared at me with eyes

as big as my fist.” Sheng Chumu got angrier as he spoke. He lifted his hand and smashed one of the cups. Pointing to the sky, he called, “Fu Rou, do you think you’re the only woman in this world?! Don’t think that I am easy to bully! I won’t serve a tigress like you!”

“That’s right, there are many other women in the world, why bother with one so difficult? Second Lady Fu has a very strong personality and is not gentle. It is not easy to get along with her. Her fourth sister, on the other hand, is a lot more obedient.” Du Ning believed that Sheng Chumu should go for someone easier.

“How do you know that Rou’er is not gentle and she is not easy to get along with?” Sheng Chumu was suddenly unhappy. “Du Ning, you are not allowed to badmouth Rou’er. I won’t let you off if you dare to say anything bad about her. Huh? Where’s my wine?”

Du Ning gave up. “You’re completely bewitched. You are suffering so much yet you refuse to give up. I think you’ve gone overboard and turned crazy.”

Sheng Chumu answered stubbornly, “I am not crazy.”

Du Ning shook his head, “You don’t even know that you broke your cup. How can you say you are not crazy?”

Sheng Chumu remained obstinate. “I broke it on purpose. I like smashing things, so what? I will smash another for you to see!”

Sheng Chumu suddenly went into a drunken frenzy, smashing anything he saw, causing a huge disturbance.

In the guest room beside them, an old friend of the Sheng family, the Lu family, had reserved the room. Lu Yunji’s nephew, Lu Hanxing, was currently having a social gathering with other local officials when he heard the commotion. He sent people to investigate and found out that it was Sheng Chumu throwing a drunken rage. No one dared to stop him because he was from the Duke Lu Residence.

Lu Hanxing’s mother had raised Lu Yunji’s children. After Lu Yunji became successful, he brought Lu Hanxing to join him. Lu Hanxing was a malicious person. In order to gain an important position from

Lu Yunji, he was willing to do anything.

Lu Hanxing was happy. Previously, Sheng Chumu had beaten up the messenger from the Lu family but his uncle did not want to cause trouble. He even took special care to ask the people from the Lu family to be more generous towards this young lord. Although on the surface his uncle pretended not to care, he had always been secretly competitive towards Sheng Xiaojing. Deep down, Lu Yunji hoped that the Sheng family would have no qualified successors, unlike the outstanding young lords of the Lu family.

Therefore, Lu Hanxing personally went over to show concern, asking Sheng Chumu what the problem was. Sheng Chumu was so drunk he could not think straight and did not notice Lu Hanxing's ill-intentions. He even asked Lu Hanxing to help him get Lady Hui's embroidery. Lu Hanxing agreed as he asked his men to find a way. The other officials then mentioned that Xu Youtong's wife had an embroidery house.

Throughout the entire thing, Sheng Chumu did not realize that he had given the task to the wrong person.

Lu Hanxing had ordered Xu Youtong to produce an embroidery from Lady Hui within three days. If not, he would be beheaded. Fu Jun knew that Fu Rou had one artwork from Lady Hui. However, she also knew that it had been passed down to her by their grandfather and held a special meaning to Fu Rou.

Nonetheless, this concerns her husband's life and Fu Jun had no other choice.

Fu Rou never thought that even after Yan Zifang, the Lu family would try to take away something that she cherished once again.

"The Lu family is too obnoxious. Second Sister, how about we ask Brother Chumu for help. After all, he is from the Duke Lu..." Fu Yin stammered.

Fu Rou's face darkened, "You are not allowed to mention him or tell

him about this.”

Fu Yin muttered, “Then what should we do? This concerns Brother-in-law’s life. If we don’t ask for help, then we have to hand it over.”

Fear lingered in Fu Jun’s heart. “Back then, the Yan family had also refused to give the King Eagle they had to the Lu family. Didn’t Lord Yan resist, causing their entire family to be killed?”

“Elder Sister, don’t worry. I understand the severity of this matter.” Fu Rou was no longer her weaker older self. “The Lu family wants an embroidery from Lady Hui, right? Okay, I will give them a fake one.”

Fu Jun and Fu Yin exclaimed simultaneously, “A fake one?!”

Fu Rou said no more as she ordered Ziyun to take out Lady Hui’s embroidery. She started to examine where the threads were, where the needle started. She was so focused she did not notice when Fu Jun and Fu Yin left.

The glow of the lamp was replaced by sunlight. Sunlight was then replaced by the light from the lamp once again. Fu Rou did not budge from her embroidery table. Stitch after stitch. Even when she was eating, she was staring at the embroidery. When she could no longer take it, she would lie on the table and take a nap.

Ziyun accompanied Fu Rou and went without sleep. When she finally couldn’t take it, she would lean against the couch by the window to sleep. She looked at Fu Rou sluggishly. She suddenly heard Fu Rou cough and rushed to pat her back. As her eyes drifted to the embroidery table, she exclaimed in surprise.

“The embroidery is beautiful. Even if Lady Hui comes back to life, I am sure she won’t be able to tell the difference.”

“I finally managed to rush it out.” Fu Rou was completely drained of energy. “Go. Elder Sister must be extremely anxious.”

As she finished speaking, she walked towards her bed, catching up on much needed sleep.

“In the three days that you did not go out, Young Lord came every

few hours to check on you. As per your orders, we did not allow him to come in.” Ziyun was about to walk out the door when she suddenly remembered this and brought it up.

Fu Rou froze for a moment before turning and heading to her study desk. Flipping a book open, there was a torn piece of paper inside. She had smoothened each piece out and stuck them back together.

Maybe she was too tired physically, so she did not want to be emotionally drained as well. Even if Sheng Chumu was a liar, she wanted to give him another chance.

When Fu Rou woke up from her sleep, it was already afternoon. There was no one in her residence and Ziyun had not come to report anything to her. Fu Rou felt a bit uneasy and wanted to go to the main hall to take a look.

The moment she stepped out into her courtyard, Sheng Chumu walked out from the side. It looked like he had been waiting for her for a while. He smiled meekly as he took out a brocade box.

Facing his smiling face, Fu Rou said, “I hate liars the most. Do you dare to say that you have never lied to me?”

“I...” Sheng Chumu hung his head, “have lied to you before.”

“No one is perfect, and we all make mistakes. But I can forgive you as long as you acknowledge your mistake and are willing to change. Will you lie to me ever again?” Fu Rou was relieved that he had at least admitted to his mistakes.

Sheng Chumu swore, “I won’t lie to you again, never again. If I ever lie to you, I will get struck by lightning.”

“Okay, I will trust you one more time.” She did not want to fight with her own emotions.

Sheng Chumu was overjoyed as he stretched out and took Fu Rou’s hands. “Really? Rou’er, you are the best.”

Fu Rou shook his hands off. "You are back to your mischievous self already." As expected, she felt a lot better forgiving him.

"I am extremely happy. You don't know how tortured I have been feeling lately. Oh right, your birthday is just around the corner. I have prepared a gift for you."

Fu Rou was curious. "What gift?"

Sheng Chumu placed the brocade box into Fu Rou's hands. "Quick open it! I promise you will like it!"

Earlier this morning, Sheng Chumu had received the embroidery from Lu Hanxing. He was quite surprised that the Lu family was so attentive to his request and was even slightly curious as to how Lu Hanxing had managed to get his hands on the embroidery. However, he would beg an enemy as long as he could make Fu Rou happy.

As soon as Fu Rou opened the box, her face paled.

In the brocade box, it was the counterfeit embroidery of Lady Hui's art that Fu Rou had spent three whole days working on tirelessly.

"Lady Hui's..." Fu Rou's voice trembled, "How come?"

Sheng Chumu misunderstood Fu Rou, thinking that she was overwhelmed with joy. "As expected of an expert, you recognise it right away. This is an embroidery by Lady Hui. There aren't many pieces in this world and each piece is precious. I spent a lot of time and effort in order to get this."

"In that case, I will have to thank you." Fu Rou wore a frigid smile. Sheng Chumu was the same as the people from the Lu family. *She must be blind to develop feelings for someone like him.*

Sheng Chumu was beside himself in joy. "You don't have to thank me. I will be satisfied if you give me a kiss."

"Okay, I will give..." A kiss? *If this person isn't a hedonist, what is he?* Fu Rou raised her hand and slapped him. "I will give you a slap!"

Sheng Chumu was stunned, as a bout of anger rose within him. Fu

Rou spat in anger, “You are shameless and despicable!”

“I am despicable?” Sheng Chumu has had enough. He had never been insulted like this before. “I have been so understanding and caring towards you, giving you whatever you want. But what have you done? Depending on your mood, you ignore me, scold me and even slap me! Do you think you are a princess? Even the Princess does not dare to slap me!”

Fu Rou yelled out furiously, “Leave! I don’t want to see you ever again!”

“Fine, I will leave! I won’t put up with a tigress like you!” Sheng Chumu spun around sharply and left.

Fu Rou’s eyes were red as tears flowed down her cheeks while she covered her face.

A few moments later, Fu Yin and Fu Tao ran over.

Fu Tao shouted, “Second Sister!”

Fu Yin continued, “Did something happen to Brother Chumu? He suddenly dashed off angrily with his luggage—”

Fu Rou forced herself to sound indifferent as she interrupted them, “I don’t wish to hear that name anymore. In the future, no one is allowed to mention anything about him in front of me.”

Fu Yin immediately fell silent.

Fu Tao frowned as his hands slowly curled into fists. He immediately sided with his sister. His second sister hardly cried, was hardly unreasonable and hardly disliked anyone so much. Therefore, it must be Sheng Chumu’s fault. When Sheng Chumu brought him to the brothel to drink, he should have thought of it then. Only someone experienced would behave so naturally. Looking at his brother-in-law and Sheng Chumu, he decided that no man in this world was reliable. He was going to train and protect his sisters by himself. *See if anybody dares to bully them then!*

Court Lady

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In a blink of an eye, autumn had arrived.

No one in the Fu family knew exactly what had gone down between Fu Rou and Sheng Chumu but they did not dare to ask. The atmosphere in the entire residence was silent, like still water.

However, one day, Third Madam's shriek caused the still water to start bubbling. Without bidding his farewells, Fu Tao had left a note saying that he had gone to join the army.

Ever since Third Madam handed over the accounts book, she had given up trying to step over Fu Rou. All she wished was for Fu Tao to take over the family's business so that she could live a happy and prosperous life. Back then, when Fu Tao wanted to learn martial arts, she was already unhappy. Now, the news of him enlisting was enough to break her heart. Although the country was peaceful now, there was always trouble at the borders. With war, there would always be deaths.

Fu Rou came over as soon as she heard the news. She looked on indifferently as Third Madam kicked up a fuss. Third Madam suddenly glared at Fu Rou. "Tao'er has always listened to you. You must have instigated him!"

Although Fu Rou did not instigate Fu Tao to enlist, it was true that she already knew about this. Fu Tao had actually gone to bid farewell

to her. "Men aspire to make their own mark. Brother Tao has his own goals and wishes to pursue them. It is not necessarily a bad thing for him to leave." Though she wanted to stop him, she was not able to.

Third Madam grinded her teeth. "I knew it! I just knew it! You are hoping that Fu Tao will meet with misfortune! You evil demon!" As she said this, she pounced forward but was blocked by Ziyun.

Old Master Fu reprimanded her, "Third Young Master is old enough to make his own decisions. This has nothing to do with Rou'er. Stop making a fuss and leave!"

Third Madam was still indignant as she was escorted out of the main hall by Old Maid Chang. However, instead of heading back to her residence, she turned and hid behind a wall to eavesdrop.

Fu Rou remained expressionless as she reported to her parents, "The dye ingredients are about to be transported from Zhanzhou and I wish to head over personally to ensure that everything goes smoothly. Firstly, Uncle Song has fallen sick and will not be able to go. Secondly, this shipment is huge and any mistake will cause our family to suffer a huge loss."

Second Madam was unwilling. "The conditions on board the ship are tough, and the seas are not safe. How can a girl like you travel so far away?"

First Madam had a different view. "When it comes to the business, Rou'er knows best. Moreover, our family frequently travels the same route from Guangzhou to Zhanzhou. There shouldn't be any accidents." She then added on a more serious note, "Second Madam, take it as a trip to allow Rou'er to take a breather."

Second Madam came to a realisation. Ever since Sheng Chumu left, her daughter has been depressed and lost weight as a result. She had no choice but to agree.

Old Master Fu added, "Speaking of Zhanzhou, I heard that they have been recruiting men for their army. Maybe Third Young Master headed over there. Rou'er, do keep a lookout when you are there."

Fu Rou agreed to his request.

Outside the hall, Third Madam heard everything and thought of a plan.

Under the scorching sun, amidst strong alcohol and horses, Chang'an had a completely different summer vibe from Guangzhou. It was bustling and flourishing.

The Duke Lu Residence was, however, silent. Something was not right.

The two brothers, Chuling and Chujun stuck their heads into Sheng Chumu's room.

Sheng Chumu sat behind his desk with a book opened in front of him.

"Elder Brother, why are you reading < < Analects of Confucius > >?" As the middle child, Sheng Chuling was the best at sensing people's emotions. "Something is wrong! Something is very wrong!"

"Second Brother, you don't understand." Sheng Chujun had the craftiness and intelligence of the youngest sibling. "He must be using the cover of < < Analects of Confucius > > to hide what he is actually reading – Hehe—Chungong drawings."

Sheng Chuling's eyes filled with respect. "Elder Brother, you are the smartest. Even if father is in front of you, there is nothing to fear. Why have I never thought of this before? I thought something happened to you on your last trip. You didn't look excited when you went to the brothel and came back home without spending the night."

Sheng Chujun rubbed his chin. "Not really. Didn't you see? Elder Brother's new image has got all the beauties head over heels for him. Second Brother, should we also work out?"

Sheng Chuling rolled up his sleeves. "Let's go!"

The two brothers did not see the frantic expression in Sheng Chumu's eyes nor how distracted and fidgety he was.

Meanwhile, Madam Sheng was discussing the change in her eldest son with Sheng Xiaojing. Sheng Chumu had been spending his days in his room studying. At this rate, he might even pass the Imperial examinations in the following year.

Sheng Xiaojing burst out in laughter as he called for Junhui. "I have been fooled by that lad for so many years. If I fall for his tricks again, I will be the biggest pig head in Chang'an."

Madam Sheng was displeased. "When Chumu returned, didn't Prince Han meet with him? Prince Han tested Chumu on the military tactics and even praised him for his huge improvement. There is no reason for Prince Han to help lie for him."

"Why not? Prince Han is his brother-in-law." Sheng Xiaojing had a different opinion. "Furthermore, do you know why Prince Han tested him? It is because I brought up the matter of marrying Chumu off to Princess Xinnan to the Emperor a while back. His Majesty did not give me a clear answer but went to talk to the Empress about it. The Empress then mentioned this to Prince Han, asking Prince Han to guide Chumu."

Madam Sheng snorted, "No wonder they are suddenly concerned about Chumu. Ever since they were young, Consort Han could never bear to scold Chumu."

"That is because you spoilt him." Sheng Xiaojing became agitated. An overly kind mother would result in weak sons.

"What's wrong with spoiling him? You spent half your life fighting for the country and finally got to where you are. What is wrong with letting our children enjoy themselves? I told you before that my children will not go to war."

Sheng Xiaojing nodded lightly, brushing her off. "Then you shouldn't care if he changes or not."

Junhui entered at this moment.

Madam Fu still wanted to clarify. “Junhui, did something happen when you and Chumu went to Guangzhou?”

Junhui thought carefully, making sure to only mention the positive things. “We met Old Master Niu Wudi, he...”

Madam Fu’s expression fell. “Don’t bring him up! I get angry as soon as I think about how he tortured Chumu in the past.”

Sheng Xiaojing prompted, “Who else did you all meet?”

“We also met...” *Should he say? How should he say it?*

Sheng Xiaojing immediately knew what was up. “Did he meet a girl?”

“Mmhm...yes.” Junhui thought that it wasn’t anything new anyway. “But...” *She is different from the rest of the girls that Chumu usually fell for.*

Sheng Xiaojing had already given up on his son. “Does he spend his days only thinking about and following women around?”

“Mmhm...yes, but not...” *Not only did he follow, he had suffered quite a bit this time.*

Sheng Xiaojing could not be bothered to waste anymore energy. “Ha! His behaviour is the same as before! I am going out; I have an appointment with Fang Xuanlin to drink.” He kicked Junhui’s butt lightly. “Get lost boy.”

Madam Fu plopped down angrily.

On the day of her departure, Fu Rou arrived at the dock early in order to personally oversee the transportation of goods onto the ship. Beside Fu Rou’s ship, there was another ship in the midst of loading goods as well. Dark red boxes were being loaded on the ship and a line had formed. Each box required two men on each side to lift and each pair took turns to quickly load their boxes on the ship. Fu Rou did not pay any attention to them as she was focused on her own goods. This trip was going to decide the future of the Fu family’s dye

workshop. It was extremely important and there was no room for error.

Wearing a cloth skirt and a hat with a veil, Third Madam hid herself amongst the crowd as she watched the Fu family's boat closely, waiting for a chance to get onto the boat. Third Madam was afraid of being discovered by Fu Rou and kept darting around to avoid being seen. In the midst of her skirting around, she accidentally knocked into one of the workers that was transporting goods on the neighbouring boat. The worker lost his balance and the shoulder pole slipped off his shoulder as the box tilted and fell onto the floor. Jewels fell out onto the ground. Third Madam stared at the jewels.

The worker fumed, "Are you blind!"

The other worker became frantic. "Don't talk so much. Hurry and pick them up!"

Hearing the commotion, Fu Rou looked over and was blinded by the jewels. As a result, she did not notice Third Madam by the side. As soon as Third Madam saw that Fu Rou's attention had been drawn over, she immediately hid away from Fu Rou's sight.

Lu Hanxing saw what had happened and immediately stepped forward, scolding them in hushed tones, "Clumsy fools. Hurry and pick them up. If you dare to say anything about this, I will come for your heads!"

All these valuables had been plundered from the rebels by Lu Yunji and Lu Qi when they led an army to subdue them. They had kept the valuables to themselves and planned to send it back to Lu Hanxing's home region. If they were caught, the consequences would be disastrous.

Therefore, Lu Hanxing was being extra careful as he looked around warily. He caught sight of Fu Rou's back view but did not see her face. Slightly concerned, he then ordered his men to investigate and found out that the ship belonged to the Fu family.

Fu Rou did not know that her moment of curiosity had caused her to become the recipient of ill-intentions. She also did not know that

Third Madam had bribed a worker to sneak onto the ship and was currently hiding amongst the goods. All Fu Rou hoped for was a smooth journey and for the Fu family's dye workshop to have a bright future.

The first night on board the ship went smoothly. On the second day, the sky was clear without a cloud in sight. Schools of fishes swam beside the ship, occasionally jumping out of the water.

Leaning against the railing of the ship, Fu Rou looked curiously at the fishes.

In the days after Sheng Chumu disappeared, she had been furious before her anger turned into pain. After her emotions had finally settled, she was left with a slight bitterness and ache in her heart. She felt bitter because she knew that she was also at fault. Thinking back, she had not really understood him. The ache was because she missed the good parts of him.

As she remembered his mischievous ways to make her laugh, she could not help but smile.

Third Madam had gotten thirsty and came out of her hiding place in order to get a sip of water. However, when she saw Fu Rou smiling and enjoying the sea breeze, her blood started to boil. Fu Rou instigated Tao'er to go through hardship but continued to enjoy herself. Third Madam narrowed her eyes as a sinister look appeared on her face. Silently, she made her way up to Fu Rou and extended her hand. *As long as Fu Rou dies, the Fu family will be hers!*

"Pirates!" A frantic cry filled the air.

Fu Rou became alert once again as she turned to look into the distance. All she saw was a black boat. It was heading straight for the Fu family's ship. A gang of boorish looking pirates stood at the front of the boat. They held huge knives and metal rods in their hands, looking barbaric.

Third Madam was frightened out of her wits. She no longer thought about harming Fu Rou as she ran frantically to the lower levels of the ship.

Although Fu Rou was afraid, she kept calm. She knew that there was no point in hiding and made her way to the kitchen in order to find some ash. She used the coal dust and ash to dirty her face and skirt. Just as she was done, the pirates entered the kitchen to ransack the area. Seeing how dirty Fu Rou looked, they did not pay much attention to her and forced her to go to the deck.

Who would have known that as she stepped onto the deck, she would see Third Madam getting pulled by the boss of the pirates, Du Long. Third Madam was about to be forced onto the pirate's ship. Du Long was just thinking that the goods on this ship were not worth much. He was hoping that there would be a lady from a rich family on this ship that he could kidnap and demand ransom for. Third Madam was extremely unwilling and desperately struggled to break free. Her resistance started to get on Du Long's nerves as he took out his whip and was about to hit her. Fu Rou dashed up and took the hit for Third Madam.

In case you guys are confused, Prince Han is Chumu's brother in law. Chumu's sister is Consort Han. Prince Han is one of the princes of the current emperor.

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“I am the Second Young Lady of the Fu family. If you want to demand ransom, you should take me. Let my Third Madam go. She has to go back in order to get the ransom money ready.” Fu Rou not only took the hit for Third Madam; she had offered herself in place of Third Madam.

Du Long grabbed a hold of Fu Rou as he looked at her in disdain. However, he realised that she was actually attractive and raised both his hands to slap the dust off her face. Alas, she was indeed beautiful.

Du Long's eyes glimmered as he laughed out loud. “Ha, she is actually attractive. This trade is finally worth it! Get the goods and take the young lady!”

Third Madam could not help but grab onto Fu Rou's sleeve. “Don't... don't take her!”

Du Long kicked Third Madam. “If you want to get her back then prepare the ransom money. If not, I will let my men have her after I am done with her myself. Any man would appreciate a beauty like her. Hahahaha!”

The pirates then left.

At another part of the territorial waters, another clash had ended in a fierce battle.

Lu Hanxing was covered in wounds as he was forced to kneel in front of the head of the pirate gang. His eyes remained fierce. "Do you all know who you are robbing? This is General Lu's ship!"

"I am robbing your Lu family." The leader stared at him with a penetrating gaze. The leader was Fang Ziyan. He was mortal enemies with Lu Yunji and his revenge had only just begun.

Fang Ziyan waved his hand, ordering his men to dump Lu Hanxing into the ocean.

Lu Hanxing was shocked. He had believed that he was going to be killed. However, as he resurfaced, he caught sight of a small boat and quickly grabbed onto it.

Fang Ziyan looked frostily at Lu Hanxing. "If you don't die of hunger, thirst or from the heat of the sun, remember to tell this to General Lu when you see him. The leader of the Four Seas Sect thanks him for supporting our men. We hope that he is well."

Lu Hanxing spat out a slew of vulgarities.

All of a sudden, an eagle's call filled the air for a long while. Fang Ziyan lifted his hand.

The eagle stooped down and landed on Fang Ziyan's wrist, closing its wings. A brass messenger tube was tied on the eagle's claw.

Fang Ziyan retrieved a note from the brass tube. As soon as he read it, his expression changed. "Du Long, you bastard. You ignored my warning to leave the Fu family's ship alone." He immediately ordered, "Fine, I shall take this opportunity to get rid of him!"

The Four Seas Sect had the greatest influence in the seas surrounding Guangzhou. When the previous leader passed away, Fang Ziyan succeeded him. The other pirate clans no longer wanted the Four Seas Sect to have the biggest influence. Du Long was not only cruel, he even schemed and ganged up with the smaller clans with the intention of replacing Fang Ziyan and the Four Seas Sect. With them

making a move, it gave Fang Ziyang the reason to attack them.

Du Long's men had always been at loggerheads with the Four Seas Sect. Without a single word, they broke out into a fight. However, Du Long's men were no match for the Four Seas Sect and the Four Seas Sect barged in.

Fang Ziyang stood in the front of the group as he led the fight but did not see any sign of Du Long. As he thought of how Du Long was well-known for being an impatient pervert, he started to worry that he was too late.

Suddenly, a cry of pain could be heard from one of the rooms. Fang Ziyang dashed in and kicked down the door.

In the room, Du Long's hands were covering the area between his legs as he rolled around on the floor. His face had paled from the pain.

Fu Rou's face had turned red from anger. Grabbing a stool, she hit him repeatedly with it. "We agreed on a ransom. How can there be someone as greedy as you? You want both the money and me? Dream on! If you ever try this again, I will make sure you will never be able to have children!"

Fang Ziyang burst out in laughter. Fu Rou immediately spun around, her eyes were brimming with anger. "Are you with him?"

Fang Ziyang walked over. Fu Rou held the stool in front of her defensively. "Don't come over!"

Fang Ziyang took off his cloak with one hand while his other hand knocked the stool out of Fu Rou's hands. He wrapped the cloak around Fu Rou's body and lifted her in his hands.

Du Long was drenched in cold sweat as he saw what was happening in front of him. Unfortunately, he was in no position to stop Fang Ziyang after Fu Rou's kick had almost rendered him disabled. He could only shout, "Fang, how dare you barge into my territory and steal someone from me..."

Fang Ziyang stopped walking as he turned his head back. With a glare

that could kill, he snarled, "I warned you that you are not allowed to go for the Fu family's ship. Since you did not take me seriously, then you have to take responsibility for your actions!" *Soon, Du Long's name will no longer exist.*

Fu Rou eyes suddenly opened. She felt as if she had a nightmare. In her dream, she ended up in the hands of a pirate. Then, she was captured by another pirate and knocked unconscious.

Fu Rou frantically sat up and looked around her surroundings. She was in a small room, with a window facing the ocean. The rays from the sunset shined through the open window, dyeing the room a fiery red. Light bounced off the blue sea, causing it to sparkle. However, she was in no mood to appreciate it.

It was only then did she lower her head and realise that someone had changed her clothes for her. She was now wearing a clean and comfortable gown.

She was shocked and suspicious but did not feel like she had been raped. Furthermore, her wounds around her wrists caused by the tight ropes had been bandaged by clean cotton cloths.

While thoughts raced through her mind, a tall man entered the room. He had a pair of sharp eagle eyes, and a rather depressing expression. Fu Rou immediately recalled that he was the one who seized her from Du Long.

Fu Rou withdrew to the furthest corner of the bed and remained alert. "My family will definitely get the ransom ready." Although she didn't understand why it was another group of pirates, they were all just as bad as each other.

Fang Ziyang looked up as he seized Fu Rou's chin. Fu Rou wanted to shake him off but Fang Ziyang switched to holding the back of her neck, forcing her to look at him. He raised his hand.

Fu Rou thought that Fang Ziyang was going to hit her. However, his hand landed softly. A cool refreshing sensation spread over her

cheek. He was just helping her to apply medicine.

Fu Rou blurted out, "You are different from other pirates."

Fang Ziyan remained serious. "Am I better looking?"

Fu Rou was not in the best of moods but as she looked at him closer, she could not help but find him slightly familiar.

Fang Ziyan finished applying the medicine and placed the medicine bottle back into his pouch. When he took his hand out, he accidentally dropped something. He quickly tried to hide it, but Fu Rou was faster than him as she snatched it away.

Fu Rou looked at the item that she had snatched away in surprise. "Why is this Pendant of Longevity with you?"

Fang Ziyan's expression did not change. "This has been mine for many years."

Fu Rou's gaze lingered on Fang Ziyan's face. "You..." *Was he Yan Zifang?*

"Back then, there was a young boy that had fallen into the river after getting shot by an arrow. My adoptive father had rescued him. He held this tightly in his hand the entire time he was unconscious."

Fu Rou was pleasantly surprised she had not expected to be able to hear news about someone from her past. "Then where is that young boy now?"

"Do you know him?" Fang Ziyan looked at Fu Rou. Fu Rou nodded enthusiastically. "I do. We grew up together and he was like an elder brother to me."

Fang Ziyan's face froze. "An elder brother?"

Fu Rou interrupted him anxiously, "Where is he now? Quick, tell me."

"He..." Fang Ziyan laughed bitterly in his heart. "Is dead."

The hope in Fu Rou extinguished in a second. For a split second, she thought he survived. If so, she would feel less guilty. Until now, she had always felt partially responsible for his death. *If only she could've convinced her family to offer him shelter back then.*

“He got shot in his left chest and the injury was too severe. Not long after we rescued him, he passed away.” Fang Ziyan declared his own death.

Fu Rou stroked the Pendant of Longevity. “Then this...”

“I thought it was quite intricate and kept it as a souvenir.” Fang Ziyan’s expression started to close off. “It has always been with me.”

Fang Ziyan then reached out to take it back. Fu Rou was not willing to let go of it. “This belongs to me.”

“You belong to me now. Why are you trying to take my things?” Fang Ziyan got off the bed and headed towards the door.

Fu Rou shouted, “Wait, what is your name?”

“I am the sect leader of the Four Seas Sect. You can call me Fang.” As he finished speaking, he had exited and closed the door.

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Fang Ziyan walked into the room only to see Fu Rou sleeping on her side. On the table, there was a newly made cape.

He smiled. He had forced her to make it but did not think that she would actually listen to him and finish it so quickly. Although he was happy, he also felt pity. As he kneeled in front of the bed, his thumb lightly brushed the bottom of her eyes. Her exhaustion was apparent from her eyebags.

“Rou’er, I am sorry.” He said softly. “I have always wanted to wear something that you personally made for me. Now that I have the chance, I was too impatient.”

Fu Rou suddenly opened her eyes. Fang Ziyan froze in shock. Fu Rou was equally shocked as well. She immediately sat up. “What are you doing?”

Fang Ziyan breathed a sigh of relief. Fu Rou had not heard what he said. Until the day he clears the injustice the Yan family had experienced, Yan Zifang will not be able to openly give her happiness. But if only she liked Fang Ziyan...

“Sleeping.” He then proceeded to lie on the bed.

“You are sleeping here?” Fu Rou shrunk towards the wall once again. Fang Ziyan, however, pulled Fu Rou into his embrace. Fu Rou was

stunned and she tried to struggle.

Fang Ziyang tightened his arms. "If you continue to struggle, I am going to take off my clothes." Fu Rou froze.

Fang Ziyang laughed. "Okay, close your eyes and go to sleep."

Fu Rou's eyes widened. Fang Ziyang sternly warned, "If you continue staring at me, I am going to make you sew a pouch for me."

Fu Rou grumbled, "Your greed has no limits."

Fang Ziyang lowered his eyes and looked at her. The tip of his nose touched hers. "Or you can let me kiss you. Choose."

Fu Rou quickly shut her eyes. As Fang Ziyang looked at her sleeping profile, her face was scrunched up and he thought she looked adorable.

"Don't leave." He blurted out.

"Why not?" Fu Rou was afraid to open her eyes and did not see the warmth in his eyes.

"We have food, silk fabric and jewelry here. I don't scold you nor hit you. What is so bad about staying here?" *If Yan Zifang couldn't give her the happiness she deserved, maybe Fang Ziyang could.*

Fu Rou shook her head. "You are a pirate."

"So what if I am a pirate?" *A pirate had saved his life in the past.* "The ocean is vast and free. We can spend our days doing anything we want."

"Pirates rob ships and kidnap women. How is that being free? Any man with functional limbs should make an upright living. Isn't it embarrassing to steal from others? I would rather die than stay with pirates."

Fang Ziyang pinched Fu Rou's chin and Fu Rou immediately opened her eyes. Fang Ziyang was taken aback by how brightly Fu Rou's eyes shone. Eventually, he sighed as he covered her eyes with his hand.

He turned his back to her and went to sleep.

He added, "Remember to make me a pouch tomorrow." Fu Rou also turned her back to him. With her fist clenched, she went to sleep. She was able to sleep because she was exhausted. Deep down, she believed that this man was not evil.

Bam bam bam! There was someone slamming on the door!

Fang Ziyang's eyes shot open. The interior of the room was dimly lit, signalling that it was still in the wee hours of the morning. *Something must have happened!* Fang Ziyang immediately hopped off the bed and opened the door.

His vice-leader, Ma Haihu hurriedly reported, "The South Navy has appeared 15 km away from us. They have about forty big ships."

Fang Ziyang shut the door as he quickly instructed, "Tell the men to guard the beach and silently observe for any changes. As soon as there are new developments with the South Navy, immediately report them to me."

Ma Haihu rushed to carry out his orders.

Fang Ziyang entered the room once again as he saw Fu Rou still in deep sleep. He adjusted her blanket before heading out and closing the door lightly behind him. Very soon, there was news. The South Navy had sent a small boat to try and dock at the beach. They had successfully ambushed the small boat.

Ma Haihu was proud. "Our island was chosen specifically because it is much easier to defend than to attack. It won't be easy to land here!"

However, Fang Ziyang felt that something was not right. "They have forty big ships but only sent one to try and dock at the beach. Clearly, they should've known we would most likely ambush them."

Ma Haihu sighed, "The South Navy has never been particularly capable."

Fang Ziyang's eyes flashed. "Maybe they have an expert with them this time. They will definitely try to find another entrance." He suddenly narrowed his eyes. "Convey my orders. Get everyone on the ships. We are evacuating!"

Ma Haihu was stunned. "Must we give up on the island? Even if we face them head on, we might not lose."

Fang Ziyang pursed his lips. "Other than a few dilapidated houses, there is nothing on this island. It is not a pity to give it up. If they were to find the other entrance, we would become easy pickings for them. I want to minimize losses. Rather than behaving like a moth heading towards a flame and putting ourselves in a dangerous position, I would rather shift us completely."

Ma Haihu was confused. Fang Ziyang continued, "Du Long's ships have been stationary these few days. The old geezers from the other sects have also left their stronghold. How can there be such a coincidence? I believe that they are meeting now to discuss how to deal with me."

Ma Haihu came to a realization. "I was wondering why you let Du Long go so easily. So this has been your plan all along."

Fang Ziyang smiled confidently. "Many find it unacceptable that I took over the Four Seas Sect at such a young age. Du Long is not the only one. It is too troublesome to deal with them one by one. So I figured why not let them all gather together and deal with them in one shot."

Ma Haihu gave him a thumbs up. "Brilliant! Just brilliant!"

Fang Ziyang waved him off. "Lead two ships out first to divert the attention of the South Navy. There is no need to go into battle, just escape when you get the chance. Go."

Ma Haihu acknowledged loudly, "I will follow your orders."

Taking big strides, Fang Ziyang entered the room. Without regard as to whether Fu Rou was awake, he wrapped the blanket and carried her in his arms. He did not forget to grab the cape. Fu Rou was jolted

awake by the sudden movement. As she saw Fang Ziyan carrying her, she immediately struggled. "Put me down! What are you trying to do?"

Fang Ziyan smacked the blanket. "Come with me if you don't want to die."

Fu Rou became alert. All of a sudden, her vision darkened as she smelt the damp air. They were surrounded by stone walls. She struggled to lift her head to look around her. As she looked up, she saw a huge cave. There were numerous pirate ships lined up in front of the cave and the entrance of the cave was covered in large vines. Fu Rou knew that this must be the exit out of the island.

Suddenly, the vines were pulled apart from both sides and two ships sped out. The ocean wind blew into the cave ferociously, carrying with it human voices. They could faintly make out, "The pirates are out." And "Don't let them escape."

Fu Rou joyfully commented, "This is karma for doing so many bad things. Are you trying to escape?"

Fang Ziyan got onto one of the boats and threw her down. He was not in a good mood. "Don't forget that we are on the same boat now. If I can't escape, you will not be able to either." With a poker face, he continued, "Arrows have no eyes. Stay here and don't come out."

Without waiting for Fu Rou's reply, Fang Ziyan locked the cabin door. He ordered the ship to set sail. Fu Rou leaned forward as she looked through a slit between the wooden shutters. Soon, their ship took off. In the distance, the sails of the navy's ships looked like clouds. The navy's ships were all a monotone colour with a narrow body and pointed head. The flags were also a monotone coloured attached with the word "South" on it. Men dressed in identical battle gear stood on board the ship.

"It's the navy!" Although Fu Rou had never seen them before, she could not help but feel happy. "Help is here!"

Looking around, Fu Rou grabbed whatever she could use and broke the wooden shutters.

However, what Fu Rou would never be able to guess would be that the person leading the South Navy was Sheng Chumu.

After heading to Chang'an in a fit, Sheng Chumu realised that even spending his days drinking had become dull. What was even scarier was that every girl reminded him of Fu Rou. He was heartbroken. He decided that if he was a man, it was no big deal to suffer because of a lady. He was going to thicken his skin and beg Fu Rou to forgive him. With Fu Rou's personality, being tough on the outside and soft on the inside, she would eventually forgive him. Hence, he had headed to Guangzhou to apologise. Who knew that he would receive news of Fu Rou getting kidnapped by pirates as soon as he reached the Fu Residence.

Only the navy was capable of dealing with pirates. Sheng Chumu then mustered determination that he had never had before and convinced General Wu from the South Navy to send out his men. He even used his official title to break through the ranks to speak to the General.

General Wu was leading the hoard of ships and was about to give chase to the two ships that Ma Haihu had sent out.

However, Sheng Chumu felt that something was suspicious as he ran to the back of the boat. He saw a huge pirate ship leave the cave and head in the opposite direction.

"General Wu, be careful! They are trying to lure you away!" Sheng Chumu shouted as he ran back. "I believe that the pirates' main forces are in the big ship!"

Initially, General Wu had looked down on Sheng Chumu. But it was Sheng Chumu that had convinced him to send only one boat to try and dock at the beach, preventing the navy from suffering a huge loss. At this very moment, he trusted Sheng Chumu and immediately changed the direction they were heading to.

As they saw pirate ships leave the cave one after the other, anyone would know that this was the pirate's main force.

Under Sheng Chumu's orders, the South Navy had turned in time and slowly closed the distance between them and the pirate ships. General Wu commanded, "Release the arrows! Slow them down!"

At that moment, Fu Rou had successfully broken the wooden shutters and ran out of the cabin. As she saw the navy giving chase, she immediately grabbed onto the railings and shouted for help.

Sheng Chumu heard a woman's voice from the pirate ships and immediately scanned the area. However, the distance was too far for him to see clearly. He did not care about anything else as he shouted loudly, "Fu Rou! Fu Rou! Fu Rou!"

Fu Rou heard someone calling her name but could not see who it was. She suddenly saw numerous black spots fill the sky above her. *It was a shower of arrows!* No matter how brave Fu Rou was, she was still a noble lady and had never been caught in a battle. She stood frozen to her spot.

A swift shadow dashed towards her, grabbing her and falling to the ground. They managed to hide behind the wall of the ship in the nick of time. In the spot that she had been standing earlier, there were tens of arrows.

"Are you trying to die?!" Her saviour was Fang Ziyang.

Fear lingered in Fu Rou's heart. "This is all because of you—"

Fu Rou's words disappeared into Fang Ziyang's mouth. He kissed her fiercely. He needed to pacify his fear of almost losing her a moment ago. Fu Rou's face blushed from shock, unable to say a single word. When she finally refocused, she had already been locked in a cabin by Fang Ziyang.

Sheng Chumu was staring fixedly at the pirate ship with the woman's silhouette. He pointed. "Ignore the other ships, that one is the biggest. It must be the one that the leader is on."

General Wu agreed with his logic and ordered his ships to focus on

Fang Ziyan's ship. He did not know that this was exactly Fang Ziyan's plan. Fang Ziyan lured the navy to the territorial waters that Du Long was in with all the other sect leaders. General Wu's attention shifted. He was delighted to have come across the meeting of the leaders from several sects. Taking them down would be a huge achievement. He no longer cared about Fang Ziyan's ship.

Seeing how Fang Ziyan was about to escape, Sheng Chumu made a decision and borrowed a ship to give chase himself.

Fang Ziyan had been pleased with himself. He had managed to use the South Navy's might to get rid of the old geezers that were against him. However, he did not expect to have someone continue chasing him. The chase stretched from day to night, unrelenting.

Fang Ziyan had always been smart from a young age. Although he had met with misfortune in the past, he had performed brilliantly in the sect after being rescued by the leader of the Four Seas Sect. He got to the position he had today all because of his desire to survive. It was rare for him to meet such a stubborn opponent and Fang Ziyan felt like he should greet his opponent and slowed his ship.

Sheng Chumu never thought that Fang Ziyan would invite him on but he was also not afraid of stepping into the enemy's territory. Putting up a plank that stretched over to Fang Ziyan's ship, he hopped over and got into a fight with Fang Ziyan.

Although Sheng Chumu had improved quite a bit under Niu Wudi, he hadn't been training long enough. When compared to Fang Ziyan, who had grown up fighting on the seas, he was still somewhat lacking. Sheng Chumu had only managed to get a cut on Fang Ziyan's cape whereas he himself had gotten kicked in the stomach as his entire body flew and knocked the side of the ship.

Fang Ziyan respected Sheng Chumu's determination to fight to the very end and thought that Sheng Chumu looked slightly familiar. But nothing was more important than killing the enemy as he pointed his sword and prepared to pierce him.

Court Lady

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“No!” Fu Rou shrieked as she stumbled and fell, using her body to shield Sheng Chumu.

“This has nothing to do with her!” After going through so much, Sheng Chumu finally managed to see her but never thought that it would be in such a life-threatening circumstance. He pulled Fu Rou behind him as he took on a protective stance.

“Who is he to you?” Fang Ziyan was stunned as an unknown rage boiled within him. He pointed his sword at Fu Rou.

Fu Rou bit down on her lip. *Who was Sheng Chumu to her? She did not know!* She only knew that when she saw Sheng Chumu, she had been overwhelmed with happiness.

He had returned for her! It turned out that she had never lost hope in him and had only been disappointed when he decided to leave.

Seeing the lack of response from Fu Rou, Fang Ziyan got even angrier as he used his sword to shove Sheng Chumu away, intending to pull Fu Rou back to himself.

Sheng Chumu reacted and grabbed the edge of Fang Ziyan's cape, refusing to let go. “Fu Rou, even though I have let many women down. I will not let you down!” He then shouted at Fang Ziyan. “If you are a man then let's end it in a battle with our lives on the line.

Don't bully women."

Fang Ziyan turned around and pulled out his sword and the cape tore.

Fang Ziyan froze. When he turned around, he saw Sheng Chumu dash over and embrace Fu Rou. Fang Ziyan felt his heart break and the pain was equivalent to dying. However, as he looked at Fu Rou, the person he did not want to hurt the most in the entire world, she didn't show the slightest concern for him. Instead, she was tightly embracing another man.

"Get lost." Fang Ziyan put away his sword. Fu Rou was shocked as she looked at Fang Ziyan from Sheng Chumu's embrace. She could clearly see his pain and was startled. A scene suddenly flashed through her mind. The childhood Yan Zifang was thrown out by the Fu family's servant. On the snowy ground, he gazed at her in sorrow.

"Get out of my sight now!" Fang Ziyan gripped the torn cape in his hand.

He was not going to admit defeat. He just needed some time to think. Fang Ziyan had let Sheng Chumu go on account of Fu Rou. He had waited so many years and did not mind waiting for a few more days.

Sheng Chumu and Fu Rou returned home. They agreed not to mention the details of what they had gone through. They simply mentioned that they suffered a few minor injuries but were more shocked than hurt. The Fu family breathed a sigh of relief. Even Third Madam murmured a prayer. "Amitabha."

However, as Sheng Chumu entered the guest room, he lost consciousness. Having travelled for days and fighting an intense fight with Fang Ziyan, it had depleted all his energy. Fu Rou stayed by his side the entire time, attending to him attentively.

"Rou'er, I like you." Although he was exhausted, his mind was clear. There were some things that needed to be said.

"I know." As she thought about it, Sheng Chumu only lied because he

wanted to make her happy.

“How about you?” What worried Sheng Chumu the most was how Fu Rou felt.

Fu Rou shook her head. “I don’t know.” As she saw Sheng Chumu become anxious and try to stand, she lightly held him down. “Why do you like me?”

“I...I have gone crazy for you. When I was in Chang'an, I thought about you in the day and dreamt of you at night. I shouted your name from the top of the city walls. I forced myself to study, practice shooting and drink, but no matter what I did, I kept feeling depressed. My heart ached. I don’t know why but you mean so much to me!” His feelings for Fu Rou were different from anything he had ever felt before. He yearned for her.

“I am afraid that you will lie to me again.” She was afraid that everything was a lie. Like the moon’s reflection in the water or a flower’s reflection through a mirror.

“I will not lie to you ever again nor play with your feelings.” He was also afraid. He was afraid that she had no feelings towards him.

“I’m scared that you will resent a tigress like me and think that I am undeserving of you.”

“When...when I said those words that day, I immediately regretted it. I am really a bastard. I...I will slap myself for spouting rubbish.”

Sheng Chumu was about to slap himself but was held back by Fu Rou. Sheng Chumu flipped his hand over and grabbed onto Fu Rou’s hand. Laughing mischievously, he said, “Rou’er, you are the one that grabbed me this time. I will never leave ever again.” Fu Rou laughed.

All of a sudden, Ziyun ran into the room. “Oh no! Second Lady! The Chen family sold the marriage contract to the Lu family. Lu Qi is here for you. He said that he wants to take you in as his concubine!” Fu Rou’s eyebrows wrinkled as Sheng Chumu immediately hopped off the couch. Pushing up his sleeves, he ran out.

Fu Rou shook her head as she laughed and shouted, “Chumu, why are

you panicking?”

Sheng Chumu answered as he ran, “I am not panicking. I am going to make whoever is trying to steal you away from me panic!”

When Sheng Chumu reached the main hall, he altered his footsteps and strode in as if he owned the place. Fu Rou walked beside him and saw a stranger sitting on her father’s usual seat.

That man was in his twenties and wore a white robe with cloud prints. His broad shoulders and thick waist showed that he probably knew martial arts. His features were neat and proper except for his eyes, which seem to emanate an evil aura.

“I thought that I had misheard. I didn’t think that it would be you, Brother Lu.” He had found out the truth regarding Lady Hui’s embroidery from Fu Yin. Lu Hanxing had caused a lot of misery for him and he had intended to get even with the Lu family.

Lu Qi was astonished. “Why are you here?”

“Me?” Sheng Chumu gestured for Lu Qi to get up as he invited Old Master Fu to take his seat. “I am Third Madam’s nephew.”

Lu Qi did not know the full story and thought that the Sheng and Fu family were really relatives. He was about to give up when he saw a bright-eyed, natural born beauty look in their direction. Her hips swayed as she walked towards them. She caused him to reignite his intentions once again. *Who was Sheng Chumu? He was just a spoilt noble that was riding on his family’s fame!*

Lu Qi laughed. “That’s great, then the two of us can become relatives as well.” Holding the marriage contract in his hand, he continued on. “The Chen family sold the marriage contract to me. The Second Lady of the Fu family belongs to me now.”

Fu Rou narrowed her eyes. “I am officially betrothed to Chen You. How can I be bought and sold like an item? I am not afraid to bring this up to court.”

Sheng Chumu’s eyes lit up. He finally realised why he had fallen for Fu Rou. It was her tenacious nature that had attracted him and made

him fall so deeply for her.

“No wonder your mother-in-law mentioned that you like to use the Tang law to argue for your twisted logic. Great, I want to see for myself.” *Tang law? Here, the Lu family’s rules are the law!*

“How is the Tang law considered twisted logic?” Fu Rou refuted aggressively. “Even if you are related to the royal family, you can still be charged for going against the law.”

Sheng Chumu knew that there was no point in rationalising with Lu Qi. “Brother Lu, the Emperor just bestowed the title of General Zhenyong on you. I don’t think you want to make a fuss over a civilian lady.”

“Fine. For you, I am willing to use her as a bet. Let us have a martial arts contest in front of an imperial judge. If I win, she is mine.” Lu Qi cursed under his breath. He was going to leave it to Sheng Chumu as to whether Fu Rou is his. He was afraid of Sheng Chumu complaining to the Emperor.

Sheng Chumu agreed without hesitation. “Okay, it’s a deal.”

“Take care, beautiful lady. Next spring, I will take very good care of you.” Lu Qi winked at Fu Rou as he took large strides out of the hall.

Sheng Chumu did not waste any time and immediately went back to his room to pack his luggage. He was going to find his uncle, Niu Wudi, to train some more. He was very clear about his abilities and knew that he had reached his limit. When it came to dealing with someone like Lu Qi, who has been training since childhood, he was still severely lacking.

Fu Rou was unhappy. “You don’t have to go anywhere. What right does he have to use me as the bet and what right does he have to challenge you. Ridi—”

Sheng Chumu placed his index finger on Fu Rou’s lips and took a step forward.

They looked into each other’s eyes, affection flowing between them. Naturally, Sheng Chumu made a move to kiss her. Fu Rou’s entire

face reddened but she did not avoid him. She slowly closed her eyes as their lips met.

Sheng Chumu embraced Fu Rou. "Rou'er, trust me. For you, I am willing to go through the depths of hell. There is nothing on this earth that can stop me from protecting you."

Fu Rou could not help but hug him back as she nodded in his embrace.

On this day, while Lu Qi could not speak up at the Fu Residence, Lu Hanxing had finally returned.

He was lucky to have run into some fisherman that helped him just when he was about to die of thirst and hunger. When Lu Yunji found out that their ship had been robbed by pirates, he fumed.

"You brought so many men with you but still got robbed? Didn't you tell them where you were from? How dare they touch our Lu family's ship!"

Afraid to lift his head, Lu Hanxing remained in a kneeling position. "It was the Four Seas Sect. Their leader had the surname Fang and said that they were targeting our Lu family."

Lu Qi snorted. "Asking for trouble."

"If they are looking for trouble, we don't have to be anxious." Lu Yunji narrowed his eyes. "Hanxing, other than the Four Seas Sect, does anyone else know what was on board the ship?"

"At the port, one of the boxes toppled over and someone might have seen the contents that fell out." Lu Hanxing recalled. "It was a merchant family, the Fu family."

"The Fu family?" Lu Qi raised his eyebrows. "What a coincidence. I was just about to discuss the issue of getting a concubine with Father. They also have the surname Fu and own a dye workshop and an embroidery house."

"It is the same family." Lu Hanxing confirmed.

"This..." Lu Qi hesitated. He had really developed slight feelings for Fu Rou.

"You have been on the battlefield and killed numerous generals. What do you think we should do with this insignificant family after they have seen something that they should not see?" *Women are like clothes. They are no big deal!*

Lu Qi composed himself. "Sheng Chumu is related to that family and is currently staying there. Should we just..." He made a killing gesture.

Lu Yunji immediately shook his head. "I just said that you were soft-hearted and you are already making another mistake. If something were to happen to Sheng Chumu in Guangzhou, do you think Duke Lu will let it go? It might even draw the Emperor's attention here. We should be covering things up, not blowing them up."

Lu Qi was suddenly enlightened. "We are not allowed to touch Sheng Chumu. As for the rest of the Fu family, they are simply commoners. A bunch of useless ants. I will make them shut up forever."

With a single hammer, Lu Yunji had decided the Fu family's fate.

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The sunset was fiery red.

In the garden, Fu Rou was working on her embroidery. Fu Yin came over with a bowl of white fungus lotus seed soup.

“Second Sister, what are you embroidering?” Fu Yin looked over curiously before sputtering out a laugh. “Isn’t that Brother Chumu? Why does he look like he just fell from the tree?”

Fu Rou covered her embroidery with a cloth. She took a sip of the white fungus lotus soup. “This is your mother’s specialty. How can you bear to give this to me?”

“My mother knows that you like to eat this but feels embarrassed to give it to you herself. She told me that she made too much as an excuse.” Fu Yin suddenly lowered her voice. “My mother is actually still very grateful to you for saving her.”

“We are a family.” Fu Rou finished the white fungus lotus seed soup but saw how reluctant Fu Yin was to leave. She smiled. “You look like you have something else to say, what is it?”

Fu Yin swallowed. “Second Sister, can you lend me some money?” Fu Rou looked at her seriously. “How much?”

Fu Yin lifted three fingers. “Three months’ worth.”

Fu Rou raised her brows. “How can a bowl of lotus seed soup be so expensive?” She intentionally narrowed her eyes. “Tell me. What do you want it for?”

Fu Yin blushed slightly. “It is going to be Du Ning’s birthday soon and I want to prepare a gift for him. He taught me calligraphy and painting. Furthermore, he knows how to do a lot of things. He knows how to fish, play music, write poems and pitch pot [1]. He is incredible!”

Fu Rou made an oh sound. “Does your mother know that you like Du Ning?”

Fu Yin did not realise that Fu Rou was trying to test her and waved her hands awkwardly. “I wouldn’t dare. Du Ning is just a scholar and no one in his family is a high-ranking official. Mother nags at me all day to find a wealthy husband. She keeps going on about how a pheasant can become a phoenix and how I should ride on my husband’s success. Aiyo, I am about to be bothered to death. How did I get such a mother? Second Sister, you definitely cannot tell my mother about me and Du Ning.”

Fu Rou laughed. “Rather than remind me, you should be careful. You keep calling Du Ning’s name casually, if you accidentally slip up in front of Third Madam then you are going to be in trouble.”

“Okay.” Fu Yin replied obediently. She continued to ask, “When is Brother Chumu returning?”

Fu Rou shook her head. “I don’t know. The place he is at now is extremely closed off. Even Junhui cannot enter.”

“Every time Brother Chumu leaves, he will come back as a different person. I wonder whether it will be the same this time.” Fu Yin looked forward to Chumu’s return.

“Maybe darker, skinnier and stronger.” Fu Rou was even more expectant. She then kept her embroidery materials. “It is getting dark, let’s head back. I will give you the money. You don’t have to return it to me, just teach me how to make your mother’s white fungus lotus seed soup.”

“Second Sister, you are the one that said this.” Fu Yin was delighted as she held onto Fu Rou’s arm.

Both sisters did not know that that very night, Sheng Chumu returned.

Sheng Chumu could not even remember what he had gone through under Niu Wudi. Although he still looked dashing and charming on the outside, internally he had turned into an iron wall. This time, however, he did not utter a single word of complaint. He was completely willing. Not only that, he had requested for all sorts of additional training, causing Niu Wudi’s jaw to drop. Before Sheng Chumu left, Niu Wudi even fished a precious item from his trunk – a Chinese Chess Manual. However, Sheng Chumu could not understand why it was precious.

“Chumu.” Someone called out to him. Sheng Chumu turned back to see Lu Qi riding towards him on a Five Blossom Horse.

A cold look entered Sheng Chumu’s eyes. However, he still greeted him with a smile. “Lu Qi.”

“What a coincidence.” Lu Qi immediately dismounted. He threw the reins backwards as his guard immediately caught it. “Since we have met, there’s no day better than today. Let’s go for a drink.”

Sheng Chumu stiffened as he did not let Lu Qi move him even an inch. “I am not going. I am scared of your tricks.”

It was too coincidental. As soon as he entered the city, he bumped into Lu Qi. It was as if Lu Qi was waiting for him.

Lu Qi laughed out loud. “Haha, so direct. You remind me of Duke Lu. You are looking down on me. Since I made a deal to compete with you, we will settle this in Chang’an. I won’t resort to underhanded means.”

“So we are really going to drink?” Sheng Chumu was moved. He did not get to drink at Wudi Manor and the alcoholic side of him was calling for a drink.

“Of course.” Lu Qi’s eyes shifted. Of all times, Sheng Chumu came

back on the exact day he wanted to make a move on the Fu family. He was not going to let Sheng Chumu ruin his plans. "As the saying goes, 'You learn more about your opponent through fighting'. Even though we already know each other, we must fight. As men, we have to fight and drink. Who knows? Maybe after our fight, we will understand each other better and can even be friends. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, we cannot be like the women. When something is not right, all they do is show a dark face and never talk to each other ever again. So petty." Sheng Chumu relaxed and allowed Lu Qi to drag him along. Ultimately, he gave in to his urge to drink.

Grabbing onto Sheng Chumu's shoulder, Lu Qi murmured, "I heard that the Swallow House's famous courtesan, Yan'er, has feet as smooth as jade. Her foot is snow-white and delicate. Rumours say that it does not even fill a person's palm. I wonder how smooth her foot feels. Will it be smoother than the daughter of the Assistant Minister of Works, Official Chen? The one that blushes super easily?"

Sheng Chumu was extremely serious when he replied, "I have never touched Lady Chen's foot before."

Lu Qi pretended to be surprised. "How come? But you are famous in Chang'an for knowing all about every courtesan's feet."

Sheng Chumu shook his head. "Let's not talk about my ridiculous past. " The two men headed to drink.

Third Madam was restless in her sleep. She had dreamed about pirates burning down their ship and she was trapped under the deck with nowhere to escape. All of a sudden, Fu Rou appeared from nowhere and pulled her to escape. However, as she neared the exit, Fu Rou suddenly disappeared.

"Ah!" Third Madam was jolted awake. The moonlight shone into the room, illuminating the smoke that filled it. The house was on fire!

Third Madam got up in a frenzy. She did not bother wearing her

shoes as she dashed out of the room. However, she suddenly turned back. She headed to the dresser and grabbed her jewellery box before running out once again. Fire was blazing all around her.

Third Madam muttered to herself as she moved, "There have been so many calamities this year. I better go to the temple to pray."

"Is there anyone out there? Please help me!" Fu Rou's voice floated out of the kitchen.

Third Madam was startled. However, she saw that the entire kitchen was engulfed in flames. She gripped her jewellery box tighter to herself and gritted her teeth as she ran towards the main door.

"Ah!" Fu Rou let out a scream before falling silent.

Third Madam came to a stop as her expression changed. Eventually, she placed the jewellery box between a crack in the fake mountain, making sure that the fire would not get to it. She then turned back and broke down the door to the kitchen.

Smoke filled the interior as Fu Rou lay on the floor unable to get up. As soon as Third Madam dashed into the room, the smoke engulfed her, making her choke. She coughed and pulled Fu Rou along.

"Third Madam?" Fu Rou was surprised and forced herself to look at Third Madam.

"You still dare to call me Madam? You brat!" Third Madam realised that Fu Rou's leg was trapped under a pile of burning wood as she quickly helped to shift it off. "What are you even doing in the kitchen in the middle of the night?"

"I was making white fungus lotus seed soup..."

Third Madam shouted, "Aiyo! If you want to eat, just get Yin'er to tell me."

Fu Rou could not bring herself to say that she had stolen Third Madam's recipe in order to personally make the dessert for Sheng Chumu.

The fire was still blazing outside the house and smoke had started to appear from a pile of ash. It was suffocating them and Third Madam's actions started to slow as she shifted the broken wood.

"Third Madam, leave me behind. Hurry and get out of here!" Fu Rou shouted. Fire was about to engulf the only exit.

However, Third Madam did not stop. "I am saving you this time. In the future, you have to double my allowance."

Fu Rou laughed bitterly, "As long as we can get out of here alive, I will give you triple of your current allowance."

The skin on Third Madam's hand was starting to peel off. However, the raise motivated her to continue. "You better not lie to me. I am going to believe you." She finally managed to move the firewood out of the way.

"Third Madam, you know that I always keep my – Watch out!" Fu Rou shrieked.

The roof beam suddenly collapsed. Fu Rou wanted to push Third Madam away but was instead shoved aside by Third Madam. Fu Rou escaped the danger but Third Madam was trapped under the roof beam and could barely breathe.

Tears immediately flowed from Fu Rou's eyes. She crawled beside Third Madam and sobbed. "Third Madam, don't worry. I will save you!" She did not care that the wood was on fire and pushed at it with her bare hands.

However, Third Madam knew that she was not going to make it. "In the fake mountain outside, I hid my jewellery box in one of the cracks. There are two pairs of bracelets in it and –" She pulled off the ring she was wearing. "This was given to Yin'er by her grandmother. You must give this to Yin'er. Don't you dare to keep this to yourself."

Fu Rou's tears blurred her vision. "Third Madam, stop talking. Nothing will happen to you."

Third Madam grabbed onto Fu Rou's hand with all her might as her gaze shifted frantically. "Tao'er, my dear Tao'er. I won't be able to

see you for the last time. I miss you. You better return safely.” All of a sudden, she seemed to realise what she was doing as she shoved Fu Rou away. She shouted angrily. “What are you doing? Leave now!”

As Fu Rou fell backwards from Third Madam’s push, a tile fell onto her leg.

Third Madam screamed, “Go! Help Yin’er find a good husband and hand over the family business to Tao’er. You better do as I say or I will haunt you in the afterlife—”

Fu Rou wore a pained expression; she was reluctant to leave. However, the falling tiles forced her to leave and she watched as Third Madam became engulfed by the fire. Each step she took was breaking her heart. She had never treated Third Madam particularly well, believing that Third Madam was shrewd. However, Third Madam was not evil. Her cowardly side was even slightly adorable. Unfortunately, it was too late for regrets, she should not have fought with her over everything.

Fu Rou was crying as she ran out of the main door. As she saw Fu Yin come up to her anxiously, she was filled with guilt. “Second Sister, have you seen my mother? She is the only one left.” Fu Yin asked, not understanding the situation.

“In order to save me, Third Madam sacrificed herself and got knocked by a roof beam...”

Holding onto Fu Yin's hands, tears streamed down Fu Rou’s face. “Sister Yin, I am so sorry.”

Fu Yin covered her mouth and burst into tears. Her legs seemed to lose strength and she fell to the ground.

Having received news of the fire, Sheng Chumu immediately rushed back. From afar, he could hear the sound of Fu Yin’s cries. His heart jumped in anxiety as he scanned the crowd frantically. He only breathed a sigh of relief after he saw Fu Rou standing in a daze.

“Rou’er!” He called out loud. Jumping off his horse, he ran towards Fu Rou.

Fu Rou's gaze was slightly delayed as she turned to look at Sheng Chumu. She remained expressionless. Sheng Chumu's heart tightened as he slowed down and spoke gently. "Rou'er, it is me" All of a sudden, Fu Rou's blank and dry eyes were filled with tears.

"Third Madam...is gone." She would actually have been overjoyed at his return but now all she felt was sorrow.

Sheng Chumu was startled as grief filled him. Although they were fake relatives and Third Madam was trying to take advantage of him, she had treated him extremely well. He could not believe that she was gone just like that. Sheng Chumu reached out and pulled Fu Rou into his arms. Fu Rou tilted her head and buried her face in his chest, crying to her heart's content.

1. An ancient banquet game of throwing arrows into a pot. The winner is determined by the number of arrows thrown in and the loser drinks as a punishment.

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After the fire had extinguished, the Fu Residence was reduced to ashes. Sheng Chumu helped the Fu family settle into one of the establishments owned by his family. Du Ning rushed over when heard the news. He sighed, "This was such an unfortunate accident."

"The Lu family did it." *What accident? This was clearly done by someone.* Sheng Chumu's eyes were filled with hostility.

Du Ning was shocked. "That...can't be true. I know that the Lu family has always been extremely competitive with your family. They like to compare their achievements, the Emperor's favour and their sons against your family. But why would they implicate other innocent people? Moreover, even if Lu Qi is fighting against you for Fu Rou, there is no need for him to use such a harsh tactic as to set the house on fire. Fu Rou almost lost her life."

Sheng Chumu nodded. "It is true that I don't have evidence, but Lu Qi's invitation to drink was way too coincidental. He was trying to make me drunk. In addition, he stole a look out of the window at least twice. The window was facing the northwest direction, which was also where the Fu Residence is. Lu Qi was waiting for the light from the fire. However, like you said, Lu Qi may not have done it because of Rou'er."

Du Ning frowned. "This concerns people's lives. Maybe you are

thinking too much.”

Sheng Chumu muttered to himself, “I trust my instincts. The truth will be out sooner or later.”

Fu Rou walked over, holding an embroidery in her hands. Du Ning left tactfully. Fu Rou’s eyes were swollen and red. “Almost the entire residence was destroyed. Somehow, this embroidery was untouched. This is for you. Previously, you wanted me to embroider something big.”

Sheng Chumu immediately broke out into a smile as soon as he saw the embroidery. “I was not peeking, err, I was reading the constellations—” However, as he saw Fu Rou’s grave demeanor, he changed his words. “I was pretending to read the constellations. I was actually trying to see you and that was why I fell from the tree. You embroidered it really well! It looks so real! Fantastic! There is nothing else in the world that is comparable to this! Look how handsome I am. I look so stunning even with my limbs in the air.”

Fu Rou giggled, “Shameless. You look like a dumb pig that does not know how to climb a tree.”

Sheng Chumu smiled, “You like me even if I am a dumb pig.”

Fu Rou refuted, “Who said that I like you.”

Sheng Chumu pointed at the embroidery. “Look here. There are four horizontal lines, four vertical lines, three ticks, one left diagonal stroke and four continuous right diagonal strokes. What is this? It is clearly the word *like* (喜欢). Do you think I can’t read?”

Fu Rou quickly argued back. “Don’t talk nonsense. That word is clearly *peace* (平安).”

Sheng Chumu was thick-skinned. “I see the word *like* from this *peace* word.” Fu Rou turned to leave but was held back by Sheng Chumu.

“Okay, okay. Whatever you say is right.” He held onto her hand. “Let’s go look at the stars.”

Both of them walked to the corridor and sat on the railings. The night

sky shone brilliantly with stars.

Fu Rou spoke gently, "The dye workshop and the embroidery house were situated near the rear garden. They were both not spared from the fire. Father said that we will be going to Chang'an to ask my Second Uncle for help."

Sheng Chumu approved. "I was going to head back to Chang'an. We can go together."

Fu Rou made a sound of assent before falling silent. A few moments later, Sheng Chumu suddenly pointed to one of the dots in the sky. "That is Goddess Zhinu (Vega)." He then pointed in another direction. "That is Niulang (Altair)."

The silence had been broken. Fu Rou sighed, "They are so far away from each other."

"That's why every year, magpies will form a bridge to link them."

"It is still sad that they only get to see each other once a year." Sighing, Fu Rou's eyes suddenly glistened. "I want to sew a picture of the cowherd and the weaver girl. I will add a bridge between the two of them so that they can meet every day."

Sheng Chumu's eyes also lit up. "Great idea." Turning back to look at Fu Rou, he continued, "Rou'er, did you know you are most beautiful when you are determined?"

Fu Rou also turned to look at Sheng Chumu. Previously, whenever she heard him boast, she would feel nothing. This time around, while he was still his happy-go-lucky self, his words were filled with warmth.

"To not get affected by anyone or anything. When I see that side of you, I feel like I am filled with energy." Sheng Chumu held Fu Rou's hand tightly in his. "From today onwards, no matter how many obstacles come in our way, we will face them together."

Fu Rou nodded forcefully as she relaxed her body slightly, leaning her head onto Sheng Chumu's shoulder. She admitted that she had a strong personality, but it did not mean that she did not want

something warm to lean back on.

“It’s great that you are back.” Her whisper brushed lightly across his ears.

Sheng Chumu’s face slowly reddened.

The father-son pair from the Lu family were on their way to Chang'an.

The Fu family was considered lucky. Lu Yunji had received news from Chang'an that the crown prince was choosing an imperial wife. Hence, although the fire did not achieve their goals, he could not be bothered. All he could focus on now was to send his daughter, Yingying, into the palace.

Lu Yingying was a beauty. Ever since she was young, she had been protected by her father and doted on from head to toe just for this day.

“Oh, it’s the ocean!” Lu Yingying had a lively personality and a very innocent mind. She was the complete opposite of her brother and father.

She immediately called out to the guard walking beside her carriage. “Quick stop the carriage. Tell Father that I want to take a break by the ocean.”

Lu Qi thought it was inappropriate. On the other hand, Lu Yunji wanted to satisfy his daughter’s wish.

“Let her go. She is still a young lady and has her own temperament after all. After she enters the palace, she will never get to enjoy such carefree days.” Hence, Lu Yunji instructed the entire group to take a break. He specifically ordered people to set up a muslin screen around the beach so that no one could see his daughter.

Lu Yingying climbed on top of the reef barefooted. She dangled her bare feet over the water, lightly kicking the water surface. She started to sing.

“A twilight over the ocean, birds chase the day as it ends. Tears fall like pearls into my open hand, but Yingying will not regret.”

Suddenly, an eagle’s whistle filled the air. Lu Yingying lifted her head. There was an eagle circling the open sky.

Just as Lu Yingying was absorbed in the sight, a few stones rolled beside her and fell into the ocean. Water splashed from the impact of the stones.

“Who’s there?” She looked towards the side. A large hand gripped onto a large stone as a man climbed on. His eagle looking eyes were chilly as his body was dripping wet. His strong physique was evident. It was Fang Ziyang.

Lu Yingying was nervous but curious at the same time. Her gaze assessed him. “Who are you?”

Fang Ziyang gestured at her to keep her voice low. “Lower your volume. Great General Lu is extremely careful when it comes to protecting you. The moment you call out, I can only jump back into the water and swim back.”

Lu Yingying revealed a bright smile. “You know my father.”

Fang Ziyang’s expression did not change. He flipped his hand over as he took something out from his waist. A cold light flashed from the edge of the blade. He had been following the Lu family’s every move and knew that they had been heavily-guarded the entire journey. He never thought that Lu Yunji would dote on his daughter so much and actually allow her to play in the water. This was the opportunity he needed. Every single person in the Lu family was his enemy. This included the innocent-looking girl in front of him.

“Of course.” Fang Ziyang chuckled coldly. “Tears fall like pearls into my open hand, but Yingying will not regret. Who is so cruel as to make you cry? You sound like you are infatuated.”

“Who is infatuated? I heard other people sing this song and learned it from them. There is no other reason behind the song.” Lu Yingying did not seem to sense the murderous aura from Fang Ziyang. “How do

you know my father? Are you part of the troops he brought?"

"You can say that. Your father is the one who taught me to become who I am today." Fang Ziyan sat down near Lu Yingying as he took a dagger out from behind him.

"Sit further away." Lu Yingying stuck out her chin. "Don't you know that man and woman must keep their distance?"

Fang Ziyan laughed. "Okay." He shifted to the side and suddenly fell off.

"Ah!" Lu Yingying was startled as she immediately peered at the water surface. "Hey, hey! I didn't do it on purpose!" The waves crashed against the shore and there was no one in sight.

"He won't drown, right?" Lu Yingying was nervous.

"Yo." Fang Ziyan's voice came from behind Lu Yingying. Lu Yingying turned around in surprise and almost called out loud. Fang Ziyan, however, was quick to react as he took a step forward and covered her mouth. They locked gazes and felt each other's breath. They were extremely close.

Fang Ziyan handed a huge oyster over to Lu Yingying. "For you, it happened to float ashore."

Lu Yingying ignored her racing heart. "Eh?"

Taking out a sharp dagger, Fang Ziyan pried open the oyster shell and retrieved a pearl from within. Lu Yingying was extremely delighted. "Wow, it is beautiful." She held the pearl under the sun and did not realise that Fang Ziyan had lifted his dagger up into the air behind her.

"Guards! There's an assassin!" Lu Qi was getting impatient and came over to rush his sister. As he saw the back view of Fang Ziyan and his dagger, he immediately drew out his sword and dashed towards the reef. Fang Ziyan placed the dagger between his lips as he disappeared into the ocean.

Lu Yingying stared at the bubbles that rose to the surface in a daze.

Lu Yunji ran over with some men. "Brother, what are you doing?" Lu Yingying asked in oblivion.

"What are *you* doing? He was holding a dagger in his hand. If I were to arrive a second later, it would have been a disaster!" Lu Qi blasted.

"Although he was holding onto a dagger, he was not going to hurt me. He was using it to open the oyster shell to give me a pearl." Lu Yingying held it out proudly for her brother and father to see.

"We have silk dresses, jewellery and exquisite cuisines at home. What kind of pearl have you not seen before? You were so easily bought over by a pearl. I really want to punch you!" *She is so stupid!*

Lu Yunji rushed over and heard what had happened. He did not blame his daughter and instead asked her if he knew the man's name. Lu Yingying expressed that she did not get to find out but promised her father that she would paint a picture of him when they arrive to Chang'an. Lu Yunji was satisfied with her reply. Little did he know that Lu Yingying had only said that to appease him.

To Lu Yingying, that pearl was invaluable.

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After a long journey, the entire Fu family had finally reached Chang'an.

Their horse carriage had just passed Mingde Gate when human voices filled the air. Hearing the bustle, Fu Rou curiously opened the window of her carriage and peered out. On the wide and straight road ahead of them, there were carriages and humans moving continuously. Both sides of the street were symmetrical and filled with tall and imposing buildings.

“Rou’er, what do you think of Chang’an?” Sheng Chumu stuck out his chest as he felt like he had returned to his own territory.

“It really seems like heaven on earth.” When Fu Rou read about Chang’an, she could not imagine what it looked like. Only now when she was physically in Chang’an did she understand.

“That is the West City.” Sheng Chumu pointed. “When you have settled in, I will bring you there to have a look. You will definitely like it.”

Fu Rou looked over as her eyes widened slightly. Shops lined the street. There were many foreign looking stores and shophouses and she could see foreigners wherever she looked. She had thought that the number of foreign merchants in Guangzhou was high but it was incomparable to Chang’an. There were various foreign races coming

from the shipping route as well as the Silk Road. She only glanced over them but the shopfronts and shop names of various shops selling spice, flowers, jewellery and food were all imprinted in her memory.

It was not that she might like Chang'an, she already liked Chang'an.

Sheng Chumu sent Fu Rou to her second uncle's home before rushing back to his own home.

He had already decided that he would tell his parents about Fu Rou as soon as possible and marry her. What Sheng Chumu did not know was that his parents had already heard about his 'Brave Achievement' and how he activated the South Navy to deal with pirates. They also knew that he had done it for a girl.

Madam Sheng had always been protective of her sons. When she heard about this, she immediately sent people to investigate who the girl was. She found out that Fu Rou had a childhood engagement before and had recently gotten married. However, on the day of her wedding, she was forced to go through an examination to check if she was still a virgin from her potential mother-in-law. She then returned home, causing her potential mother-in-law to faint from anger. All these incidents made Madam Sheng anxious. She was desperate to ask her son to stay away from this "vixen". Little did she know that when her son came back, he also brought the girl along with him.

Therefore, Sheng Chumu only managed to mention that she was from a merchant family. He did not even have the chance to bring up Fu Rou's name before Madam Sheng immediately objected. She even threatened him to make a choice between her and Fu Rou.

Madam Sheng had been extremely certain that her son would choose her. After all, she had always doted on him and could never bear to scold or hit him. She had always stood up for him in front of Sheng Xiaojing. She did not expect that Sheng Chumu would resolve to marry Fu Rou and even pushed the choice back to her. She had to either permit Sheng Chumu to marry Fu Rou or he would not acknowledge her as his mother.

Pushed to her wit's end, she went to find her daughter, Consort Han, to cry to.

Consort Han naturally sided with her mother, believing that Sheng Chumu was acting wilfully but was ultimately still a filial child. She gave her mother the idea of pretending to be sick to distract Sheng Chumu while she dealt with Fu Rou.

Sheng Chumu naturally fell for it and stopped forcing his mother to choose. He accompanied her and even personally brewed medicine for her.

Fu Rou did not manage to meet Sheng Chumu but was instead confronted by Consort Han's servants. Everyone knew that Consort Han was Sheng Xiaojing's daughter. However, Fu Rou could sense that Consort Han's intentions were not good and wanted to ignore her. Unfortunately, Fu Rou's second uncle did not allow her to ignore Consort Han. It was then that she realised that her second uncle was working in Huanglaishun Pawn Shop. The Huanglaishun Pawn Shop was owned by the Han Mansion. Because of this, Fu Rou could not reject her invitation. After all, her second uncle took their entire family in out of the goodness of his heart. She could not cause him to lose his job.

Fu Rou walked through the garden with a bridge and a pond. She walked past the public square built with white stone and stepped on the long and broad stone step. She finally entered the majestic main hall of the Han Mansion. Luxurious items were everywhere but the most luxurious of all would be Consort Han.

Consort Han had her hair combed in a high updo, pinned with golden hairpins. Her appearance was extremely exquisite as she wore a dress with pink hibiscus on it. She was also wearing a thin muslin cloth that stretched to the floor. She sat upright on the main seat, giving off an imposing aura.

However, Fu Rou was calm and did not give off an inferior vibe. Although this was her first time meeting a noble from the royal family, she had learned embroidery for over ten years and had long understood how people behaved through dealing with embroidery matters.

“Our Han Mansion is lacking a seamstress. I heard that your embroidery skills are pretty good. You can stay with us.” Consort Han was impressed by Fu Rou’s calmness but remained unfriendly.

Fu Rou was surprised as she had assumed that Consort Han would be more direct and ask her to leave Sheng Chumu. *Who knew that Consort Han would ask her to stay in the Han Mansion? Was Consort Han afraid that she would not go to a far away enough place and rather keep her closer to watch her?*

Consort Han sneered, “People can rely on other people’s success. However, if a person is not tactful and offends someone that they are in no position to offend, they will bring trouble to their entire family, not to mention the successful person they were relying on. Isn’t that right?”

“Thank you, Consort Han, for the reminder.” Unfortunately, her second uncle was relying on the Han Mansion and anyone related to Fu Rou would be implicated.

Consort Han proudly instructed her butler, “Give her a five year contract as a seamstress. Anything that she needs, including her meals and clothes, will be covered by the residence. Her salary will be doubled. Don’t let other people say that our Han Mansion is stingy. Every year, she will be allowed one day of leave during the new year holidays to go back to see her parents. For the rest of the time, she is not allowed to take a single step out of the Han Mansion.”

Her butler brought a contract over to Fu Rou. Fu Rou gritted her teeth and stamped her fingerprint on the contract. She did not forget to greet Consort Han before leaving with the butler.

Consort Han looked at Fu Rou’s retreating back as her expression softened. Her mother had exaggerated slightly. Fu Rou was indeed beautiful but did not give off a vixen vibe. Her behaviour was still generous and appropriate and she was qualified to at least become a concubine. She was going to let Fu Rou stay in the Han Mansion for a while to learn the rules and how to conduct herself. Given that Sheng Chumu was adamant on marrying her, it was bound to be better than letting her die.

After several days had passed, Fu Rou's emotions had stabilised. She believed that all these were temporary and Chumu would find a way to get to her. Moreover, the work that she had to do in the Han Mansion was a lot easier than she had thought. All she had to do was mend clothes and no one intentionally made things difficult for her.

Carrying the clothes that she had just mended, she was going to hand them over to Maid Xiahn. From afar, she could hear a smacking sound followed by Xiahn's anguished cry. Fu Rou quickened her steps. She saw Madam Lu, the head of the seamstress department, asking other servants to cane Xiahn.

Madam Lu had given one of Consort Han's robes to Xiahn to mend. Xiahn took silver and gold threads as well as pearls to mend the robe but procrastinated on mending the robe. Alas, as Madam Lu sprung a surprise check on her today, she found out that Xiahn had yet to begin and had resorted to caning her.

Although Xiahn had acted slightly haughtily when she was assigning Fu Rou with tasks to do, she did not try to make things difficult for her. Fu Rou felt like she did not have a bad nature. Hence, Fu Rou stood still and waited for the caning to stop. After Madam Lu left with the other servants, she assisted Xiahn back to her room.

Fu Rou looked around the room and her gaze eventually settled on an elegant looking robe. She picked it up to have a look, "Although the hole is pretty big, it is not impossible to mend. Why weren't you able to finish it?"

"I thought that you would need at least a few days to finish this. I can't believe that you are done so quickly and it does not even look like it has been mended." Xiahn remained silent initially. However, as she flipped over the robe that Fu Rou had mended, she was extremely surprised.

Fu Rou smiled as she placed the robe back down. "I have passed the robe to you. I shall take my leave."

Xiahn held onto Fu Rou and stammered, "Can...you help me?"

“You have to answer my question first. Did you make that wedding gown for yourself?” Fu Rou glanced towards the corner of the room. There was a huge trunk lying in the corner with the cover down. However, the wedding gown was peeking out from the corner and glimmering in gold and silver. It also had pearls sewn in it.

Xiahan quickly headed towards the trunk. Initially, she was intending to shove the wedding dress back in. However, she thought about it and decided to take it out as she walked in front of Fu Rou. She told Fu Rou that the wedding dress was for her younger sister. Her parents had passed away when she was young and her younger sister was currently under their uncle’s care. Now that her younger sister was about to get married, the only thing she could do for her was to personally make her a wedding dress. The reason why she stole some of the silver and gold threads from the Han Mansion was to make her sister’s wedding dress look more precious. It was all to make up for the years that she could not spend beside her younger sister.

Fu Rou was slightly moved and thought of Fu Yin. She had promised Third Madam to give Fu Yin a glamorous wedding. When the time comes, she will be like Xiahan and wish to give the best to her sister.

“How much material do you have left? Bring it all over. Let me help you.” When it came to maximising whatever little material there was, there was no hurdle that could stop Fu Rou.

She does not take shortcuts and would always try her best. It was only valuable if she put her heart into it.

At the risk of getting beaten, Junhui snuck information to Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu realized that this was his mother and his elder sister’s plot to separate him and Fu Rou. Sheng Chumu barged into the Han Mansion. Not only did he face the guards with his sword unsheathed, he even shouted at his elder sister, who had doted on him since he was young.

“Sister, where have you hidden Fu Rou?” How absurd. If there have a problem, they should come for him. It has got nothing to do with his innocent Fu Rou!

Consort Han walked up to him and gave him a hard slap. Sheng Chumu was momentarily dazed.

Consort Han reprimanded, "This is the Han Mansion! The residence of the fourth prince of the current Emperor, Prince Han Litai! How dare you brandish your sword?"

Sheng Chumu knew that he had overstepped his authority and did not dare to argue back.

"Back then, when you studied military tactics and learned to ride and shoot, I was happy for you. I thought that you had matured. I never thought that you would lose your composure. How can you barge into the Han Mansion and make such a big commotion just because of a girl? If things were different or slightly more serious, would you barge into the palace? Are you trying to bury the entire Duke Lu family with your bare hands?" The pain travelled from Consort Han's hand into her heart. She had never hit this younger brother of hers. However, as the saying goes, spare the rod and spoil the child. She had to hit him.

"I am in the wrong. But this has nothing to do with Fu Rou. Elder Sister, please let her go."

"I can't do that." Consort Han had already made up her mind. This was a good chance to train Sheng Chumu. "Keeping Fu Rou by my side is a wake-up call for you. If you continue to tangle yourself with her, I will kill her."

Sheng Chumu became frantic. "You dare!"

"I dare." Consort Han maintained a cold glare. "Why? Do you want to point your sword at me now?"

Sheng Chumu took a deep breath. All of a sudden, he seemed to be able to control his anger as he knelt down in front of Consort Han. "Elder Sister, I really like her. I have never liked someone so much before. I beg you to not hurt her."

Consort Han was moved but she did not show it. "Father spent his life on the battlefield and suffered numerous injuries before he was

conferred the title of Duke Lu. Now that our parents are getting old, you have to be the role model to your two younger brothers. Chumu, you can't behave as wilfully as you did before. Fu Rou is safe with me. If you truly want to be with her then you should show your sincerity. You can't ignore the consequence and do as you wish. The first thing you have to do is gain Mother's approval."

Sheng Chumu did not blink and listened to his sister. He then bowed politely to Consort Han. Consort Han was slightly relieved. She felt that her brother had matured quite a bit. As Sheng Chumu walked out, he saw Fu Rou walk over.

Deep down, Consort Han cared for her brother. When she knew that Sheng Chumu had come, she summoned Fu Rou so the two could meet.

For a moment, his gaze became docile. Fu Rou was also overwhelmed with emotions. However, as she remembered Madam Lu was ahead of her, she quickly lowered her gaze. However, Madam Lu understood Consort Han's intentions and quickened her steps after greeting Sheng Chumu, giving the two of them some space. Sheng Chumu took the chance to grab onto Fu Rou's wrist. "I will get you out of here. Wait for me."

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“I will always wait for you.” Fu Rou gently removed her wrist from his grasp as she continued on her way.

Hearing what Fu Rou said, Sheng Chumu walked with an air of determination as he left. Having seen Chumu, Fu Rou also felt more confident in facing Consort Han.

“I heard from Xiahan that you were the one that mended this robe.” Consort Han had summoned her because of the mended robe that she received that morning.

Fu Rou looked at Xiahan, who was standing nervously by the side. She smiled. “Yes, it was me.”

Consort Han did not mention how the entire robe now looked much better but only commented, “There are less pearls.”

“I removed some.” Fu Rou replied, “Too much of anything is never good. The same goes for embroidery. The picture on this robe is already extremely vibrant. It was embroidered with gold threads, silver threads, five different colours of silk and a large number of pearls. It was so dazzling such that it looked slightly coarse.”

As soon as Madam Lu heard this, she scolded. “Impudent! Consort Han is extremely respected and honourable. It is only right for her to wear luxurious clothes. Who are you to critique?”

Consort Han said to Fu Rou, "Continue speaking."

Fu Rou gained confidence. "An embroidery is like a painting, it cannot be completely filled. Some areas should be complicated while other areas should be intentionally left blank. Only then, can the irregular arrangement become charming and refined. This is just my humble opinion. Please forgive me if I am wrong."

Consort Han seemed happy as she nodded. "Although there are less pearls on this robe, it still looks pleasing. You have done well. Reward her."

By the side, a servant carried a plate. On it were two strings of coins. Fu Rou received them. "Thank you, Your Highness."

"However, I still have to punish you for making your own decisions to change the design on the robe." Consort Han gestured. Two servants carried a large screen over. It was covered in a white fabric with a picture of a peony on it.

"This was a peony drawn by a famous artist, Fan Luzeng, also known as Mister Fan, for his son. I have always wanted to turn it into an embroidery but could never find an appropriate person to do it. Since you seem to be good at embroidery, I will hand this task over to you. Fu Rou, you have to be careful with this. If you do this well, you will be rewarded. However, if you don't, I will add on today's mistake and you will be receiving a harsh punishment."

Fu Rou's eyes were already glowing with excitement. *Not only would she be able to see a famous painting, she could also try to embroider it out. What a valuable opportunity.*

Fu Rou was pondering over the picture of the peony when Xiahan walked in. The two of them had gotten closer because of Xiahan's younger sister's wedding dress. "Are you still thinking about the screen? If you really can't embroider the flower, I suggest that you ask for forgiveness from Her Highness. Her Highness has always been forgiving. She will at most scold you but will not give you a harsh punishment." Xiahan was still feeling slightly guilty. After all, this

was all because of her.

Fu Rou turned back and smiled at her. "It is not that I can't do it. I am thinking about the best way to embroider it. When dealing with a high grade embroidery piece, where the first stitch is placed is the most important thing. Once I have thought it through, the rest will be easy."

Fu Rou noticed the paper bag in Xiahan's hand and asked, "You just came back from your relatives? How is your sister?"

"My sister was extremely delighted when she saw the wedding dress. When she heard that you helped me, she specially bought a green bean cake for me to give to you." Xiahan opened the box containing the green bean cakes.

The two of them chatted while enjoying the green bean cakes. "It has been a few days since you entered here, why haven't you gone out to visit your relatives?" Xiahan asked.

"Her Highness only allows me to have one day of leave over the new year." Fu Rou paused as her tone became light once again. "But the days will pass very quickly. There is someone out there who is more anxious than me. He is thinking of a way to get me out of here."

"Who is this person that you are talking about?" Xiahan was extremely curious. Fu Rou smiled but did not say anymore. It was not yet time to announce her relationship with Sheng Chumu. Not only was this to protect herself, it was also to protect him.

"Fine, I won't ask. I want to ask you for another favour." Xiahan took out a pouch. She flattened her hands together as she pleaded earnestly. "Can you help me bring this to the Pear Garden and give it to someone?" She leaned in towards Fu Rou and whispered the name into her ear.

Fu Rou teased Xiahan. "You have to personally give it to him to feel your sincerity." She remembered the lonely look that Xiahan had when she talked about her sister getting married. She did not not know that Xiahan already had someone she liked and was delighted for her.

Xiahan blushed as she grabbed onto Fu Rou's elbow and acted cute. "If I could hand it over myself, I would have done it already. Why would I have to ask you? Will you help me please?"

Fu Rou succumbed to her coax as she took the pouch and headed to the Pear Garden.

There were quite a number of people in the Pear Garden. Some were training their voices while others were practicing their expressions and actions. Some were also rehearsing for a play. Fu Rou was looking at everything with interest when all of a sudden, someone holding a rod walked up to her. "Who are you looking for?" The man was handsome with stunning features. He was on the tall side. The edges of his eyes were turned slightly upward as his pupils could change expressions easily.

"Is Xiong Rui around?" Fu Rou liked beautiful people and smiled at him gently.

"Xiong Rui is on leave today. He went to visit his relatives. If you have something to tell him, I can relay it to him when he gets back."

The handsome man spoke slowly, giving off a casual and lazy vibe.

Fu Rou retrieved the pouch from her sleeve. "Someone asked me to give this to him. Since he is not around, could I trouble you to pass it to him?"

The handsome man replied, "You have to at least tell me who it is from."

"Xiahan."

The handsome man took the pouch and turned to leave.

"Wait." Fu Rou called him back, learning from him quickly. "You have to at least tell me who I am passing the pouch to."

"It is just a pouch. Are you afraid that I will keep it for myself?" However, he continued to answer, "My name is Chen Ji. Got it?"

“Got it.” *That’s a nice name.*

In the Duke Lu Residence, it was bustling with activity like before. However, it was slightly bewildering. Although it was still the same three brothers, instead of playing and drinking all day, cries of anguish from studying filled the room.

Sheng Chumu held a huge rod in one hand and a small lash in the other. When it came to disciplining his two younger brothers, he was unrivalled, even against Niu Wudi. He forced them to study in the day and train in the night, refusing to let them rest.

This kind of activity made Madam Sheng anxious whereas Sheng Xiaojing was smiling. Both of them came to the same conclusion – Sheng Chumu was finally acting like an elder brother.

However, when there is oppression there would always be resistance. On this day, the two brothers could not stand it any longer as they crawled to their mother for help. Grabbing onto her legs, they cried to her for help. Although Madam Sheng could tell that they had lost weight, her two younger sons still seemed to be filled with energy. She did not know how to comfort them and instead chose to side with her eldest son.

“Chumu is doing this for your sakes.”

Sheng Chuling pointed at his eyebags. “Mother, he has already thought of where our graves should be.”

Sheng Chujun had a medicinal tape stuck on his nose. “He has already decided on the shape and material of our coffin.”

“This...” Madam Sheng held back. “Your elder brother is like your father...”

“He is even fiercer than Father!”

“Ten times fiercer! He has beaten us to a pulp!”

“King of hell!”

“An executor!”

“Mother, if you don’t help us, we will...we will start fighting amongst ourselves!”

“That’s right! We are going to rebel against Elder Brother. We will resist to the end!”

The two brothers let out complaint after complaint. They stick their heads out, looking like geese crying out.

Sheng Chumu suddenly entered the room. “I have been looking all over for you guys. Are you all here to greet Mother?”

Sheng Chumu knelt down as he took a tea cup and offered it to Madam Sheng. “Mother, please have some tea. Be careful, it is hot.”

Madam Sheng reached for it in a daze. She took a sip, feeling slightly uncomfortable with how polite her son was behaving. Sheng Xiaojing had just returned from a court meeting and walked through the door. He looked at the scene in front of him, lighting up with interest.

Having caught sight of him, Sheng Chumu thought that he would make use of this opportunity. He could show off to his parents and brothers.

“Have you all memorised the books that I asked you to?” Sheng Chumu let out a dry cough.

Sheng Chujun and Sheng Chuling immediately answered. “Yes!”

“The water bird calls as it resides by the sandbank. A nobleman desires a beautiful virtuous woman.”

“The lush reeds are covered with snow. The one I am looking for is somewhere nearby.”

“This is not the homework that I gave you both last night.” It was not easy to trick Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chujun and Sheng Chuling exchanged fearful looks. Sheng Chumu narrowed his eyes in a smile. “You didn’t memorise it? Okay,

then...”

“Oh oh! I remember it now!”

“I remember it too!”

Sheng Chuling and Sheng Chujun recited what they had memorised simultaneously. “A truly knowledgeable person will behave magnanimously while an ignorant person often chooses to harp on petty things. Bragging is meaningless while small speech is tickling.”

Sheng Chumu sneered. “What small speech is tickling? Small speeches are powerful.”

The two brothers immediately clasped their fists together and bowed politely. “Yes, yes, small speeches are powerful. Thank you for your corrections, Elder Brother.”

Sheng Xiaojing rubbed his hands together and walked in. “The saying goes: A filial son is raised by a rod. In our Duke Lu Residence, it seems like the rod is producing virtuous brothers. It seems like you all have studied quite a bit. How about your martial arts? Are your shoulders still hunched and your arms too weak to carry anything other than women’s shoes?”

Sheng Chumu replied, “It is not possible to train both riding and shooting in such a short time. I have only asked them to follow me and strengthen their bodies. Cough, cough!”

The moment Sheng Chumu coughed, his two younger brothers immediately sprang to action. They both took on a horse stance as they shouted. *Ho ho!*

Sheng Chumu attempted to curry favour with his parents. “Father, Mother, are you all satisfied with this?”

Sheng Xiaojing and his wife nodded in synchrony, unable to close their mouths because of the huge grin plastered across their faces.

Madam Sheng was touched. “I have always believed that all my sons had potential. Especially you, Chumu. You don’t take any action, but the moment you do, you amaze us all. With you in the lead, I am not

worried about your two brothers.”

Sheng Chumu continued asking, “Now, I am no longer the hedonistic son you had in the past right?”

Madam Sheng did not know that this was a trap. “Of course not.”

Sheng Chumu pressed on. “Then can I start to settle down?”

Madam Sheng answered smoothly, “Of course.”

Sheng Chumu finally brought up the main point. “Then can I marry Fu Rou?”

“Of—” Madam Sheng managed to stop herself in the midst of her sentence. “No!”

“What?” Sheng Chumu could not understand. “Why can’t I? I am studying, training martial arts, teaching my brothers and remaining filial to you. What haven’t I done enough such that you are still not satisfied?”

Madam Sheng had something to say. “You have done well and I am very pleased. That is why all the more you cannot marry Fu Rou.”

It was rare that Sheng Xiaojing sided with his wife. “In the past, you did not have the qualifications to be picky. But it is different now. You are from a family of Dukes, well-read and skilled in martial arts. You are good at both studying and fighting. You are the kind of son-in-law that everyone wants. How can you take a commoner as your wife?”

Madam Sheng was filled with confidence. “That’s right. Chumu, you should marry Princess Xinnan.”

Sheng Chumu froze. After putting in so much effort to increase his own qualifications, they wanted him to marry Princess Xinnan! He was furious!

Court Lady

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The biggest drinking house in Chang'an was packed with customers. All the tables were filled except one huge table. Only two guests were seated around the table. One was crazy while the other one stared blankly. Although they were talking, they could not understand one another.

The crazy one shouted, "I spent so much effort but why is the result like this? Not only does Father and Mother object against Rou'er, they are adamant on me marrying the Princess!"

The blank one muttered, "Today morning, I went to look for Yin'er. However, she told me that her mother had always wanted her to marry an official. But I love my freedom."

"I miss my Rou'er!" The crazy one was Sheng Chumu.

"Which is more important? Yin'er or my freedom?" The blank one was Du Ning.

"What must I do for my mother to agree?" Sheng Chumu was on the brink of tearing off his own hair in frustration.

"I have decided to participate in the Imperial Examination." Du Ning elegantly poured tea.

"Rou'er must miss me so much her heart hurts."

“Yin’er just lost her mother. I really want to protect her so I am willing to do anything she wants me to.”

Sheng Chumu was the first to step out of his daze as he gripped onto Du Ning’s collar. Du Ning’s blank face made him even angrier.

“That’s enough!” Sheng Chumu had sensed something fishy between Du Ning and Fu Yin long ago but was too lazy to bring it up. However, he did not come today to listen to his friend complain. “I am the one who asked you out and I am the one paying. You keep going on and on about Fu Yin, what is the meaning of this!”

“Let go.” Du Ning’s expression did not change.

“I won’t let go!” Sheng Chumu bellowed, “Hurry and help me think of a plan!”

“How can I think if you are holding on to my collar like this? You still dare to say that you understand military tactics. You can’t even deal with your mother.” Du Ning shook his head.

“Precisely because she is my mother so I am restricted. With my mother blocking me, as her son, I can’t push her aside.” No matter how frustrated Sheng Chumu was, he could not be unfilial.

“Have you heard of having pity on a parent’s heart?” Du Ning had wanted to make him think. But as he saw how angry Sheng Chumu looked and thought about his own neck, he decided to forget it. “There is another phrase. To move back onto the correct path after being led astray is extremely precious.”

Sheng Chumu repeated these two sentences to himself as he suddenly hit his own head. “Du Ning, you are amazing!” Sheng Chumu fished out a silver ingot and threw it on the table before turning to leave. “Hurry go and inform my family that I will be shaving my head and leaving human society.”

As Madam Sheng received the news from Du Ning, she panicked as she rushed to the temple. She caught sight of her son kneeling down as an abbot held onto a shaving blade and extended it towards her

son's head. Madam Sheng shrieked, "Stop right there!" She rushed forward and grabbed the shaving blade before flinging it into the distance. She hugged Sheng Chumu tightly.

"My son, what are you trying to do?" Since this year, her oldest son was her main focus while her other two sons were simply the side characters. She had pinned all her hopes on Sheng Chumu.

"This Madam..." Sheng Chumu held back his laughter.

Madam Sheng stuttered in shock. "You, you, you...what did you call me?"

"Human society is too difficult. I have decided to let go of everything and separate myself from society. I will cut myself off from the six roots and no longer have parents or siblings. Sheng Chumu lowered his eyelids to prevent her from seeing through him. "Madam, please return."

"Okay, let's return. Men, come and tie up the Young Lord. Bring him back to the residence. Without my permission, he will not be allowed to take a single step out of his room."

Did he think she was a pushover? Don't get it wrong! The real person who made the calls in the Duke Lu Residence was her, the madam of the house. Even the world-renowned Sheng Xiaojing had to help her wear her shoes!

The servants tied Sheng Chumu up and brought him back with them.

In the following few days, Sheng Chumu was locked in his own residence. The front door of his yard was locked. His room door was locked. There were guards on the inside and outside of his garden, keeping watch over him.

Madam Sheng thought that if she separated Sheng Chumu from the temple, her son would calm down eventually. However, Sheng Chumu kept threatening to either castrate himself or starve himself to protest. She felt like she had grown a whole bunch of white hair just because of him.

On this day, Madam Sheng gritted her teeth as she personally brought ten beauties to him. She asked the ten beauties to form a line in front of Sheng Chumu. She went against her own beliefs that women should be strong and seek self-improvement, they should not simply rely on their appearance.

Sheng Chumu did not even spare them a glance. “Their faces are covered in powder. Appearances are nothing and emptiness is an appearance.”

“But didn’t you used to love beauties in the past?” Madam Sheng’s first reaction was that her son had truly changed for the better. However, she thought about it and realised something was wrong. If even this tactic did not work, this meant that she could not change her son’s mind.

Sheng Chumu looked down in embarrassment. “Madam Sheng, you are right. In the past, I don’t know how many misdeeds I have done and how many ill-fated relationships I formed. If I don’t repent in front of the Buddha, how will I resolve this karma?”

“Okay, okay. Let’s not bring up the past. Since you have repented, why will there still be karma?” Madam Sheng blamed herself for bringing up the past.

“Only if I repent, can I reach enlightenment. If Madam Sheng does not allow me to join the monastery, I shall starve myself and not drink any water. I’d rather return to heaven as a ghost. Even a speck of dust can reside next to Buddha’s foot.” Sheng Chumu held his hands in a prayer.

As Madam Sheng was listening to him, something resembling a tornado dashed out of the room. In a blink of an eye, Madam Sheng appeared once again like a tornado blowing in.

“If you won’t accept any of these ten beauties, will you accept that Fu Rou girl?” *She refused to believe this!*

Sheng Chumu was bursting with happiness. However, as he lifted his head, he maintained an apathetic look. “Who is Fu Rou?”

Madam Sheng froze. "The one that you were adamant on marrying the past few days."

Sheng Chumu made an *Oh* sound. "I have already forgotten all about that female benefactor."

Madam Sheng had thought that the reason her son was torturing himself was because of Fu Rou. Who knew that her guess would be wrong.

"Love is a temptation. Buddhism is the only way for me now. Even if I die, I will persist on." It was as if there was light emitting from the top of Sheng Chumu's head. He got more enthusiastic as he spoke.

"You..." Madam Sheng was stunned. "You don't even want Fu Rou anymore?"

"Nope." Sheng Chumu was afraid that his mother was just trying to test him.

"You don't care about Fu Rou anymore?" Madam Sheng was really panicking now.

"I have already made up my mind." Sheng Chumu closed his eyes as he prayed *Amitabha*. He cracked open his eyes slightly to steal a look at Madam Sheng. Madam Sheng's eyes were red from crying as she stumbled out of the room. He thought that he should not go overboard. "Wait a minute! I am indebted to the Duke for raising me up. A person has emotions and I will not be heartless. How can I leave without offering an incense to the Duke? If I just leave, this will just add to my debt." Sheng Chumu could not just let her leave like this.

Madam Sheng was delighted as she rushed back. "That's right, it's not good to accumulate favours."

"In that case, before I leave, I shall find a woman and leave behind a descendent. It shall count as my repayment to the Duke for raising me." Sheng Chumu racked his brains to find a way to bring up his original motive.

"I will look for some beautiful ladies for you right now. You can give

birth to many children. I want a lot of grandchildren!" *When that time comes, maybe you will stop having ridiculous thoughts of becoming a monk.*

"You definitely cannot do that! If you find another person, aren't you forcing me to create yet another ill-fated relationship?"

"You mean --" Madam Sheng was trying to guess what he meant but was afraid that she would agitate her son if she did not get it right.

"Clothes should be new while people should be from the past. Since I already have an ill-fated relationship with the girl named Fu Rou, then there is no harm trying to revive our past." Sheng Chumu carefully assessed his mother's reaction as he said this.

"Fu Rou, ah..." Madam Sheng hesitated.

"If it is not possible then forget it." Sheng Chumu tried his best to remain nonchalant.

"Sure, sure sure! As long as you don't become a monk... if you want her then you can have her!" Madam Sheng did not dare to object anymore.

"Madam Sheng, does that mean you allow me to bring Lady Fu Rou over from the Han Mansion?" Sheng Chumu wanted a confirmation.

"Why are you still calling me Madam Sheng?" Madam Sheng shouted, "Yes I agree! I agree!"

"But I am going to say this first. The only reason I am bringing her out is to continue the bloodline of the Duke Lu Residence. Once I have repaid you all for raising me, I will seek to find and cleanse myself once again."

Madam Sheng was finally starting to see that her son was truly determined to leave human society. She started to see Fu Rou as her only hope. "Son, you can't do that. After all, she is still an honourable, gentle and beautiful lady. How can you leave her alone after making her give birth to your children? Son, Buddha teaches us to be kind. You have to treat her well for her entire life."

“We can talk about this in the future.” Sheng Chumu pressed his palms together acting indifferently. Internally, he was jumping with joy.

Consort Han stood in front of the embroidered screen as she looked at the peony. The peony looked as if it had just bloomed. It appeared life-like, seeming to sway in the wind. It was placed directly across the door, seeming to mirror the garden outside. She could not help but reach out to touch it as she gasped in amazement.

“This has been embroidered well.” She hid her appreciation for it as she maintained a neutral tone. “There is an important meeting in the residence today. Place this screen at the main entrance where the noble guests will enter. It will brighten the place up.”

The biggest event in Chang'an was happening. It was time for the Crown Prince to pick a Crown Princess. Both the Emperor and Empress Zhangsun were focused on this matter. Currently, the palace has already predetermined two ladies. One was Lu Yunji's daughter and the other was Sun Tan's daughter. They were both not bad and the decision was up to the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince and Prince Han had the same father and mother. They were both Empress Zhangsun's children and had always been of the same mind. Hence, the Han Mansion was designated to be the place where the choosing of the Crown Princess was going to be held. On this day, in the name of hunting, Prince Han invited the Crown Prince out of the palace. Consort Han then invited the Lu family and the Sun family to bring their daughters along.

Consort Han was just about to ask Fu Rou what kind of reward she desired before she caught sight of Sheng Chumu poking his head through the door. He looked extremely happy. She guessed that her mother had given approval and she no longer had to show Fu Rou an attitude. She asked Fu Rou to leave.

As soon as Fu Rou stepped out of the door, she was pulled aside by Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu entered Fu Rou's room and he told her how he managed to get his mother's approval. Fu Rou felt slightly bitter-sweet when she heard how Sheng Chumu even went to a temple and threatened to become a monk. She was glad that he did not misplace her trust in him. The two of them interlocked both their hands, with emotions flowing heavily between them. All of a sudden, they were interrupted by two sparrows.

"Did you manage to see?"

"Yes, I did. So the reason why Elder Brother went crazy was because of this beautiful lady."

"Beautiful lady? I want to see too, let me see."

"Keep quiet, if Elder Brother finds out that we are here. We are dead."

Sheng Chumu laughed awkwardly at Fu Rou as he walked silently to the door. He suddenly pushed the door open. The sparrows, no, his two brothers, fell flat into the room.

Sheng Chumu's lips turned up in an artificial smile as he tugged his two brothers' ears. "Since we are brothers, what is there to be modest about? Just walk right in to have a look." He introduced them to Fu Rou. "This is Chuling and that is Chujun."

The two brothers shouted in synchrony, "Nice to meet you, Sister-in-law!"

It was the first time that Fu Rou was meeting them. They were all stunning in their own ways and their personalities were different as well. Chuling seemed composed and quick-witted. On the other hand, Chujun looked lively and clever. It was today that she could make the judgement that although the three brothers were famous for being hedonists, they were simply big playful men. Their personalities were not bad.

"Who is your Sister-in-law? What glib tongues. No wonder your Elder Brother says that you all are devious and only know how to flirt with girls." Therefore, Fu Rou spoke to them casually, causing them to feel

closer to each other, like a family.

“That’s not right. Today, we are here to visit Elder Brother and you, Sister-in-law.” Sheng Chuling raised his eyebrows playfully at Sheng Chujun. Sheng Chujun added on. “That’s right. We are also here to see the future Crown Princess.”

“Crown Princess?” Sheng Chumu asked curiously.

“Elder Brother, recently you have been so into leaving the family, shaving your head and starving yourself that you have lost touch of the new developments in Chang’an.”

“The Crown Prince is choosing a Crown Princess. She will either be from the Lu or Sun family.”

Fu Rou’s eyes widened. *Lu Yunji was already behaving like he owned the place. What will happen if his daughter becomes the Crown Princess?*

“Lu Yunji, that monkey. He can continue dreaming!” Less was needed to say about Sheng Chumu. With his old and new hatred added together, he was definitely not going to let Lu Yunji get what he wanted.

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In the hunting grounds at the hill behind the Han Mansion, there were numerous wild animals. A few of the more precious animals were given by the Emperor and the Empress. The Emperor thought that this chubby son of his was adorable. Although he was not concerned with national affairs, he was well-read and could manage a school. Together with other scholars, his son published several good books and writing, entertaining him during his free time. Hence, the Emperor often rewarded him.

The Empress' intentions were simple. The Crown Prince loved to hunt. If the Han Mansion had a hunting ground, the two brothers could spend more time together and improve their relationship. Moreover, the Han Mansion was located outside the palace and if they were to talk about matters there, it would still be considered within the family.

At this moment, a horn blared, signaling the end of the hunt.

Chen Ji, who had been sleeping soundly on a tree branch, was abruptly awoken. When he looked down, he saw a man trying to climb up the tree he was on. He slipped every time he took a step. His posture was comical.

Chen Ji looked around and saw an eagle that had been shot, hanging on a tree branch. Using both his hands to support him, he scooped

the eagle and hopped swiftly off the tree. He landed gently onto the ground.

“I didn’t know Your Highness also knows how to climb trees.” Chen Ji held the eagle in his hands. However, the way he held it could not be said to be extremely respectful. After all, he was at the bottom rung of society, he might as well give off a lazy vibe.

“You know who I am?” That man had clean features and emanated a noble vibe. He spoke in a manner that no one would dare to contradict him.

Chen Ji kept his eyes lowered at the ground as he kneeled. “I recognise the robe that Your Highness is wearing.”

“Rise.” The Crown Prince accepted the way he spoke as he replied warmly. “I didn’t climb the tree for the eagle. I climbed it for the golden arrow. The golden arrow was given to me by my Father Emperor and I cannot lose it. You cannot spread rumours about this. Do you understand?”

“Understood.” Chen Ji got up. “I will take my leave.”

The Crown Prince stopped him. “What is your name?”

Chen Ji’s eyes curved as he smiled, “Could it be that Your Highness is planning to reward me?”

The Crown Prince looked down at his waist, only to see a single jade pendant hanging from it. He could not help but hesitate.

“In the future, if I ever have the opportunity to meet you again, you can reward me then.” Chen Ji bowed as he took his leave.

The Crown Prince was amused at this strange person. If it were anyone else, they would not have dared to refuse his request. It was also precisely because he was strange that the Crown Prince thought he was interesting and let him off easily. Chen Ji did not know that his strangeness had actually saved him from trouble as he headed back to the Han Mansion, free of worries. On his way, he bumped into Fu Rou.

“Chen Ji, why are your clothes torn?” Fu Rou noticed immediately. As a seamstress, she was naturally observant when it came to things like this. Chen Ji glanced over. “It got caught on a branch. This is so troublesome. I hate sewing the most.”

“Give it to me.” Fu Rou extended her hand.

“You are new here and don’t know the rules well. The people from Pear Garden are not allowed to assign tasks to seamstress.” Chen Ji suppressed his ego as he abided by the rules.

“Take it as me thanking you for helping to pass the pouch the other day. However, I have something to do now and will need a few days before I can complete mending your clothes.” Fu Rou was currently headed to help Sun Lingshu on Consort Han’s order.

Chen Ji was glad. “It is not urgent. As long as you don’t forget about it. Thank you.” He took off his outer shirt and handed it over to Fu Rou.

Fu Rou said goodbye to Chen Ji before proceeding on her way. She was thinking over Consort Han’s request. Consort Han said that Lu Yingying’s dance outfit was extremely eye-catching. On the contrary, Sun Lingshu’s dance outfit was rather plain. She wanted Fu Rou to go over and see if she could help her fix it. Fu Rou was happy to help. To someone evil and despicable, if heaven does not sort him out, someone ought to do it. Even if it is just to make him feel uncomfortable, it would be worth it.

The banquet area in the Han Mansion was overlooking a lake. It was tall and broad, surrounded on all four sides by sliding doors. On clear days, the doors could be completely opened to admire the scenery around. The blue sky and green lake formed a breathtaking scene.

The Crown Prince was sitting on the main seat while Sheng Chumu sat on one of the side seats respectfully. After completing their meal, Consort Han announced that the performance was going to start. Everyone knew that the daughters from the Lu and Sun family were about to perform.

The music started as Lu Yingying was up first.

Sheng Chumu realised that Lu Yunji's daughter did not look like him and she was actually quite beautiful. Her dance was also above average as her body flowed like a butterfly among flowers. It was a pity that the more Lu Yunji bragged about his daughter, the more he rejected her. Lu Yunji even bragged that the music was composed by Lu Yingying herself. The Crown Prince was, however, completely engrossed. When Sun Lingshu, who was simply-dressed, presented her dance, the Crown Prince seemed distracted. Sitting in the main seat, his gaze remained on Lu Yingying.

At this moment, Sun Lingshu started to spin, the more she spun the faster she became. The Crown Prince's attention suddenly changed as he now focused on Sun Lingshu. Flower petals rained around Sun Lingshu. As she spun, she pulled aside her pleated skirt and out flew numerous flower petals. Her skirt was like an umbrella as it held the flower petals before releasing them. She did this multiple times. The ultimate display of Sun Lingshu's dance caught the attention of the Crown Prince. Lu Yingying no longer had a place in the Crown Prince's eyes.

Sheng Chumu subconsciously touched the pouch by his waist. He seemed to realise something as he peered past the banquet's stage. As expected, he caught sight of Fu Rou. He laughed. *It is no wonder that she was his Fu Rou. Only her embroidery could be so mysterious. From here on, it is time for him to take action. He was going to make sure that Lu Yunji's daughter will not marry the Crown Prince!*

"Crown Prince, what do you think?" Consort Han asked as she smiled.

Consort Han knew beforehand that the dance outfit from the Lu family was superior to the Sun family. She felt that a skirt shouldn't be the judge of how things go. She never thought that Fu Rou would be so capable and turn the tables.

"Well –" The Crown Prince was amazed by Sun Lingshu's flower dance but appreciated Lu Yingying's appearance as well. He suddenly realised that Sheng Chumu was laughing with a meaningful look and pointed him out. "Lord Chumu, I am in a tough position but you look

like you are enjoying yourself. You are well-versed regarding the noble ladies from various families in Chang'an. If you don't mind, how about you share with us what you know."

"If Your Highness wishes for me to share, I will do as you say. However, you can't punish me if I say anything wrong." Even if the Crown Prince did not allow him to comment, he will still find a way to state his view.

The Crown Prince laughed, "Speak your mind. I will not hold you accountable."

Sheng Chumu stood up and gave a bow. "If I were Your Highness, I would definitely choose the noble lady from the Lu Residence. She is renowned for her beauty and her dance abilities have been said to resemble a fairy. Her voice is also sweet—"

Lu Yingying could not help but feel pleased. Who knew that Sheng Chumu's words would suddenly take a turn. "Furthermore, her skin is very smooth and her feet is white. Ah, oh yes. Especially the birthmark on her lower back, it makes men go crazy."

Everyone was stunned by Sheng Chumu's words. Lu Yingying's expression turned embarrassed in a split second. Lu Yunji fumed. He slammed the table and was about to explode.

Consort Han shouted, "Chumu, what audacity! How can any outsider see Duke Chen's daughter's body? How dare you spread rumours in front of the Crown Prince! Hurry and apologise to the Crown Prince!"

Sheng Chumu listened to her. "I was too frank. Please forgive me, Your Highness."

The Crown Prince looked at him seriously. "Were you being frank or were you spouting nonsense?"

"I do not dare to lie to you, Your Highness. If you do not believe me, you will know after you choose the noble lady from the Lu Residence." Sheng Chumu lowered his head, the corners of his mouth tilting up slightly in a sly smile.

The Crown Prince glanced at Lu Yingying once more. His gaze was

cold. Consort Han gestured and a servant brought a tray to the Crown Prince. A peony, taken from the palace, lay on the tray.

Consort Han said, "Although it is a difficult choice, Your Highness still has to make a decision."

The Crown Prince had already made up his mind. "Amongst all the flowers, my mother loves the peony the most. Not only is the peony luxurious and graceful, it also does not attract other bees and butterflies. I heard that Lord Sun's daughter also loves peonies. I will give this peony from the palace to Lady Sun."

Sun Tan was overjoyed as he led Sun Lingshu to kneel down and express their thanks. The father and daughter pair from the Lu family looked unhappy.

Consort Han smiled. "Since it is so rare that the Crown Prince visits us, our Han Mansion has also prepared a play. Please enjoy the show."

The Crown Prince's interest was piqued. "What show?"

Consort Han answered, "Zhao Zilong's seven charges into Changbanpo."

The Crown Prince approved. "Let's watch it."

As everyone left the banquet, Prince Han purposely fell behind. He gave a thumbs up to Sheng Chumu. Prince Han did not usually get along with Lu Yunji as well. Sheng Chumu gave a small smile. *This was what they get for messing with Fu Rou!*

Court Lady

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After everyone left, a young girl in a palace maid uniform appeared from behind the pillar. Her face was round and fair. She stomped her foot unhappily.

“Damn it. No wonder he is Chang’an’s number one hedonist. He even knows about Lady Lu’s birthmark on her lower back. What a pervert. How can I marry someone like him?”

This girl was the daughter-in-law that Sheng Xiaojing had wanted, Princess Xinnan. Although Princess Xinnan was not Empress Zhangsun’s biological daughter, Empress Zhangsun was the one that raised her and the Crown Prince and Prince Han doted on her heavily.

She had disguised herself and blended in with the Crown Prince’s palace maids just to get a glimpse of Sheng Chumu. Although her Imperial Father did not have a good impression of Sheng Chumu, he had yet to turn down Sheng Xiaojing’s offer out of respect for Sheng Xiaojing’s reputation.

Princess Xinnan was afraid of the unlikely possibility that she would have to marry Sheng Chumu. However, she was a reasonable person and wanted to at least see how he was like before she rejected him. Now that she had seen him, she was certain he was not a good man.

“Eh? Everyone left?” Sheng Chuling entered and saw Princess Xinnan.

He sat on top of a table. “Pour me a cup of tea.”

Princess Xinnan looked around her before pointing at herself in bewilderment. “You want *me* to pour you tea?”

Sheng Chuling pointed at himself. “Then do you want me to pour my tea myself?”

Princess Xinnan momentarily forgot that she was wearing a palace maid’s uniform as she poured him tea begrudgingly. However, she used too much force to place the tea on the table, and the tea splashed all over.

“You...” Sheng Chuling decided to do it himself. “I know how difficult your lives are, so I shall not argue with you.”

“How do you know that our lives are difficult?” Princess Xinnan found it strange to hear this coming from a man. She did not know that Sheng Chuling had just heard this from Fu Rou.

“Why wouldn’t I know? You all have to train to maintain your posture. Your body has to be straight, your neck has to be aligned. It sounds terrible.” Sheng Chuling was already boasting his knowledge even as he just learned it. All of a sudden, he stared at Princess Xinnan. “You are quite pretty. Are you new? I don’t think I have ever seen you before.”

Princess Xinnan hesitated. “I just came today. My name is Qing... Qing’er. Who are you?”

“Consort Han is my elder sister. I am Sheng Chuling.”

“Oh, so you are Sheng Chumu’s younger brother, Sheng Chuling.” Their names, Chumoliangjian [1], were famous in Chang’an.

“You have no respect for the rules. Call me Lord Ling.” *So much air for a young girl.*

“I am a servant from the Han Mansion, not your Sheng Residence. You have no right to reprimand me.” Princess Xinnan argued back.

“Aiyo, you are quite daring aren’t you? I will kiss you if you dare to

argue back.” Sheng Chuling threatened her.

“You dare!” Princess Xinnan was not easily frightened.

“Why wouldn’t I dare? If I say I will kiss you, I will.” Sheng Chuling hopped off the table and grabbed onto Xinnan, quickly pecking her on the lips.

Princess Xinnan lost her composure and pushed Sheng Chuling away. Sheng Chuling lost his balance as he fell and hit his head on the doorstep, passing out immediately.

Princess Xinnan put her finger under his nose anxiously to check whether he was still alive. When she realised that he was still breathing, she was relieved. *This brat could not blame her. How dare he order her around and even stole her first kiss!* She looked into the distance, glancing at Duke Lu. He looked especially upright and proper. *How could his sons be so inappropriate?*

At this moment, Princess Xinnan stuck out her tongue at the unconscious Sheng Chuling. “You better not appear in front of me ever again!”

At the performance stage in Pear Garden, the show on Zhao Zilong’s seven charges into Changbanpo was being performed. The fighting scene was very exciting.

“Prince Han, this performance troupe of yours is quite talented.” The Crown Prince complimented.

“Consort Han loves watching exciting plays like this. I specially spend money in order to hire those with excellent martial arts performance skills to stay in my performance troupe.” Prince Han clearly pampered his wife.

Lu Yunji was still furious about the earlier incident. “It is just a play. After watching too many times, it becomes dull, unlike the battlefield where blood is shed for loyalty and honour.”

“General Lu fought for the country and has huge achievements. That

is why the Emperor has conferred the title of Duke Chen on General Lu. The Emperor is wise and has always been fair with his rewards and punishments. For his ministers that deserve to be rewarded, he has already rewarded them appropriately. As his subjects, we cannot be greedy. Am I right, Duke Chen?" Prince Han's words were filled with intention.

Lu Yunji realised that the Crown Prince was also looking at him and could only hold it in. "Yes, Prince Han...you are right."

At this moment, an exciting battle scene occurred on stage, dazzling the audience. The person acting as Zhao Zilong stole Cao Cao's horses and suddenly turned around and revealed his face. He was Chen Ji.

The Crown Prince immediately noticed. "What is the name of the person acting as Zhao Zilong?"

"His name is Chen Ji."

"Good. Call him over. I want to reward him."

Soon, Chen Ji came over. Bowing deeply, he said, "Greetings, Your Highness."

"Chen Ji, this time I will reward you properly." The Crown Prince retrieved his jade pendant and gave it to Chen Ji.

Chen Ji received the jade pendant and looked at the Crown Prince. "Thank you, Your Highness."

At this moment, servants came in to report that the Empress had arrived. Everyone rushed back to the main hall.

In front of the Peony Screen, an elegant woman stood. She had a golden phoenix hairpin in her hair, and a few silver strands framed her skinny face.

"Greetings, Imperial Mother." The Crown Prince and Prince Han came up to greet her. The other people bowed along with them.

Empress Zhangsun turned around. Her smile was warm yet her eyes looked slightly tired. "Don't stand on courtesy."

Empress Zhangsun had come to the Han Mansion as she was concerned about who her son had chosen. When Consort Han told her that the Crown Prince had given the peony to Sun Tan's daughter, she was delighted. Sun Tan was a courageous and straightforward advisor that was not afraid to express his opinions. She did not forget to console Lu Yunji and expressed that she would help his daughter to find other suitable candidates. She then turned around to look at the Peony Screen once more.

Lu Yunji was feeling hatred towards the Han Mansion and immediately made use of the opportunity. "I remember that Your Majesty's Lizheng Palace also has a screen embroidered with a peony. This screen is, however, much more exquisite."

Empress Zhangsun replied nonchalantly, "There are quite a few beautiful things in the Han Mansion."

Consort Han was startled. "Mother, I know that you have always loved the peony flower. For your birthday next month, I instructed someone to embroider a peony on a screen as your birthday gift. This screen was supposed to be sent to the palace next month. Since you like it, I will get someone to deliver it to Lizheng Palace right away."

"Consort Han has always been filial." Empress Zhangsun was curious about something else. "I wonder who is so talented as to embroider such a beautiful piece?"

"It is a seamstress from my Han Mansion. Her name is Fu Rou." Consort Han did not dare to lie to the Empress.

Empress Zhangsun commented, "With such skills, she must be smart. Call her here, I would like to meet her."

Fu Rou was summoned. She was feeling nervous but her face remained calm. "Greetings, Your Majesty. My name is Fu Rou."

"Are you the one that embroidered this peony screen?" The Empress thought that this girl looked graceful and generous.

"Yes."

"I have seen numerous peony embroideries but this peony screen is

very unique. It showcases the beauty of the peony and looks extremely life-like. What secret technique did you use?"

"Your Majesty. In order to show the beauty of the peony, the colour of the flower petals have to look natural. When others embroider the flower, they usually use a single colour. However, I change the colour of my thread to suit the colour of the petals. I dyed the threads before using them to embroider the petal. To make it look life-like, it is necessary to make it slightly bumpy as if it were real. On top of interleaving the stitches as done in the Sun embroidery method, the pattern has to follow along the actual veins of the leaves. I used different techniques like the slanting and looping stitch."

Empress Zhangsun made an oh sound. "You know how to dye threads?"

Fu Rou replied, "My family used to own a dye workshop and an embroidery house. I learn a bit from there."

Lu Yunji started to find Fu Rou familiar. He suddenly remembered seeing Sheng Chumu pulling this girl's hand and heading to the back of the mansion when he entered the Han Mansion earlier.

"Congratulations, Your Majesty." Since Sheng Chumu ruined his plans, Lu Yunji wanted to get his revenge. "His Majesty has always acknowledged talented young people and looked to groom them. I am sure Your Majesty feels the same way. How can you give up such a talented young woman like her?"

"Duke Chen, I agree with your rationale. Fu Rou's family has an exquisite technique and can serve the Royal Family. The Seamstress Department currently has a position. It will be considered a good use of talent if she could manage the dyeing of fabric and embroidery in the palace."

The more she looked at the peony screen, the more Empress Zhangsun liked it.

Consort Han was about to speak up but caught sight of Prince Han giving her a look to remain quiet.

As Lu Yunji saw Fu Rou's face pale, he sniggered, "Fu Rou, shouldn't you hurry and thank Her Majesty?"

Fu Rou had no choice and kneeled down. Ever since she had arrived at Chang'an, it was as if she no longer had control of her fate.

Sheng Chumu came to find Fu Rou as soon as he heard the news. Sheng Chumu saw her standing by her window, pointing at the distance between the Altair and Vega star.

Walking up to her, he sighed. "I wanted to ask Her Majesty to let you go but Elder Sister felt that this is not the right time and bringing it up will only implicate your family and mine." He looked at the stars alongside Fu Rou. "Why does Her Majesty want to split the Cowherd and the Weaving Maid with a silver river?"

"Maybe it is to test them. True love will go through numerous challenges. Just like the Cowherd and the Weaving Maid. Just like Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai."

"If we were butterfly lovers, that would still be okay. We can still fly across the ocean and eat pollen every day. We can also give birth to a few hairy caterpillars."

Fu Rou snorted out a laugh. "Even at this time, you are not serious."

Sheng Chumu grabbed onto Fu Rou's hand. "How else will we survive if we do not find joy in suffering? When will you enter the palace?"

"According to the Empress' decree, I will head home tomorrow to bid farewell to my parents before entering the palace the following morning." Fu Rou had already calmed down. "I believe that we can get through this."

Sheng Chumu nodded sharply. "But once you enter the palace, we won't know when you will be able to come out again. I am not leaving tonight."

Fu Rou's eyes widened as her cheeks flushed red.

Sheng Chumu waved his hands. "Don't worry, although I am young and vigorous, I treat you with utmost respect." Sheng Chumu knew that Fu Rou was not a frivolous lady and he had to cherish her and wait until they get married.

Fu Rou thought of how after tonight, they wouldn't know when they would be able to meet again and her heart softened. "Okay. You sleep on your pillow and I will sleep on mine. You can't move close to me."

Sheng Chumu raised his hand into the air. "I swear."

Hence, the two of them each occupied one corner of the bed, with their backs against the wall. They hugged their knees to their chests as they sat.

After a while, Sheng Chumu said, "Rou'er, can I..."

Fu Rou did not wait for him to complete his sentence. "No."

After a while more, Sheng Chumu persisted. "Even a tigress would let me touch her fur."

Fu Rou remained stubborn. "You are the one that said you would treat me with utmost respect – Ah!" Sheng Chumu moved like a black panther, pushing Fu Rou down onto the bed and kissing her.

The beauty of the moon reflects how touching their emotions were. With that single kiss, it was like a pledge of eternal love. They sealed their commitment to each other for the rest of their lives.

After a while, he slowly released her lips and the tip of his nose brushed the side of her cheek.

Sheng Chumu's gaze was aggressive, like a starving panther seeking permission from his partner. However, Fu Rou, whose ears had reddened along with her face, quickly became clear-headed as she pushed Sheng Chumu away. Sheng Chumu scratched his head and retreated to another corner, hugging his knees once again. He was truly going to respect her.

Yet, Fu Rou was displeased. "You disrespected me."

“You are right, I was too disrespectful. I should have kissed you harder, longer and more intensely.” *If he knew she was going to act this way, he should have continued kissing her and never let go.*

“Shut up.” *How could he say something like this?*

“Fine. I will shut up.” Sheng Chumu smacked his lips as he pondered on the aftertaste. “My mouth is filled with fragrance. This can last me three days.”

“Sheng Chumu, you are despicable.” *How could he continue and say even more intense things?*

“After you enter the palace, I will spend my lonely days thinking back on this memory. I will count on this memory to slowly get me through the torture. I will persevere until the rain clears and the day is bright.” Sheng Chumu slowly began to undo his belt.

“Sheng Chumu, what are you doing?” She covered her eyes in fright as even her neck reddened.

He held one side of the belt and threw the other side to her. She released her hand and grabbed onto one side of the belt. She then heard him say the most moving words on earth --

“This is our silver river.”

1. original names used in the novel

lol are any of you guys impressed by the shameless male lead?
Hahahaha!

Court Lady

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It was snowing heavily as Fu Rou entered the Royal Palace. In front of her, the Royal Palace looked like paradise. Behind her, Sheng Chumu sent her off with heavy emotions. Her footsteps were light and even the loud slamming of the palace door did not bring out the timid side in her.

She truly believed that she would soon leave these gates. When that time comes, he would still be there.

Because she started off on a good note, Fu Rou was able to adapt quickly. She thought that the Seamstress Department was where palace ladies who knew how to embroider and dye went. She was ready to start right from the bottom. It was only after she understood that she realised she has not seen much of the world.

The Royal Palace has six offices, each containing four departments, forming a total of twenty-four departments. She was in one of the departments. The Seamstress Department was made up of females. Any seamstress from rank six and above could dispatch people from their department. A Head Seamstress was also in charge of all the dyeing and embroidery in the palace and their position was not low. They even had a personal female servant to serve them. It was even better than the Han Mansion. Her responsibilities were a lot more now. She even had to go to the Rites Office to learn the palace's etiquette and was only considered an official palace worker after she

passed the examination. On her first lesson, she was late because she had stayed up all night going through the ledger. She was then reprimanded severely by a rites official, Official Situ. She then studied and practiced with other newly-entered palace ladies for the entire day. Her hands and legs were aching by the end of the day.

However, Fu Rou gained something from this. From the new palace ladies, she found out a lot of gossip regarding Official Situ. Although Official Situ was unreasonable, Empress Zhangsun regarded her highly. Official Situ had accompanied the Crown Prince when he was young and she had influence with the Crown Prince. Fu Rou thought back on the scolding that she had received and understood that Official Situ was merely doing her job. Her opinion on Official Situ changed as she decided to put in more effort into learning etiquette.

Fu Rou only returned when the sky was dark. She was about to rest when Lady Li handed a tray containing embroideries over to her.

A Lady's position is only second to a Head Seamstress. Ever since the previous Head Seamstress retired, Lady Li had always managed the department. When Fu Rou came, she brought the other palace ladies to come and greet her. She handled everything that was needed for the transition and even took the initiative to have over the ledger. Fu Rou felt relieved.

Lady Li presented the tray to her and took two steps backward. Her movements were delicate and her beauty was above average amongst regular palace ladies. If she was not wearing the standard uniform that female officials had to wear, anyone who paid a little attention to her would realise that she was a unique beauty.

“Head Seamstress, this is the embroidery for Concubine Yan. According to the rules, you have to be the one to personally deliver it.” She was beautiful and her voice was pleasing.

Concubine Yan was an imperial consort second only to the Empress. She gave birth to Prince Zhou and received much love from the Emperor. There could not be any delays when dealing with someone of her rank. Fu Rou did not think more as she immediately headed to Concubine Yan's palace. It was only when she reached the palace that she felt something was off. The internal attendant blamed her for

delivering it so late in the day, when the sun had already set. He mentioned that she should have delivered it in the morning.

Fu Rou was stunned as Lady Li had never mentioned this and only said that this could not be delayed. She immediately had her guard up. Fu Rou's suspicion arose and looked at the tray that was covered with a cloth. As the attendant was leading the way, she took the chance to flip open the tray. Although the embroidery was beautiful and perfect on the top, the bottom was extremely torn. It was as if someone had intentionally torn it.

Fu Rou was shocked, but it was too late for regrets. It took less than ten steps to get from the main entrance to the main hall. When she appeared in front of Concubine Yan, she did not say a single word. Dropping to her knees, Fu Rou revealed the tray to her and exposed the torn embroidery.

"I made a mistake on my first day here. I failed to check the embroidery when it was handed over to me before rushing over to deliver it to Your Highness. When I found out that there was a mistake, it was already too late. I am here to admit my mistake and to beg Your Highness to give me another chance. By tomorrow morning, I will deliver the embroidery that you wanted." The only thing she could do now was to tell the truth and admit her mistake.

"You are very honest." Concubine Yan could tell that there was something unusual about the defect. "Lift up your head."

Fu Rou looked up to face the lady that was sitting on the chair.

If Empress Zhangsun was considered dignified and elegant, Concubine Yan would then be beautiful and alluring. Her son was already an adult and she was obviously old in terms of age, however, there was not a single sign of her age from her appearance. She was stunning and looked as if she had never experienced hardship and had been sheltered all her life. Therefore, she could maintain her youthful and pure beauty.

"The truth is better than lying."

"In the Royal Palace, there aren't many that speak the truth."

Concubine Yan smiled before her tone changed. "You mentioned that this embroidery was handed to you by someone else. Who is this person?"

"I was the one that failed to check when I received this defective good. It is my fault and I should be the one that is punished." Fu Rou would solve her own problem.

"In the Royal Palace, this place is full of schemes and people trying to frame each other. Your refreshing answers are a good thing. For today's matter, I will temporarily not hold it against you. As for the department that you are managing, it seems like it is time to clean up the smoke." Concubine Yan wanted to see Fu Rou's capabilities. "Are you the one that sewed the peony screen that the Empress recently loves?" Concubine Yan asked indifferently.

"Yes." Fu Rou did not think deeply before answering.

"I like water lilies. Sew one with similar dimensions for me." *Whether she is stupid or smart, this test would show.*

The next morning, Lady Li brought her subordinate, Attendant Yuan, as she walked merrily into the Seamstress Office. She did not expect to see Fu Rou sitting calmly studying the ledger.

Although Concubine Yan was an easy-going person and treated everyone kindly despite her high rank, it did not mean that she did not have a temper. Moreover, the Seamstress Department had repeatedly delayed producing the embroidery that she wanted. Even if she was a goddess, she would have a limit. Lady Li did not expect her to let Fu Rou go.

A competitive look entered Lady Li's eyes.

"Lady Li, you missed out one of the account books when you handed them over to me." Fu Rou did not bring up the previous day's events. Lady Li froze.

"There should be another account book recording the money, cloth and threads used in this department." Fu Rou pointed out.

Lady Li finally reacted. "There are many different kinds of material used here and the numbers are complicated. Over the years, we have also been stockpiling the excess. The accounts are extremely complex. I am afraid you will not be able to understand it. Why don't we follow the same rules that the previous Head Lady Wen set? I will record a list with Attendant Yuan. At the end of the month, I will report the summarized list to you."

"Speaking of rules, I still have to go to the Office of Rites tomorrow to learn palace etiquette. I might as well ask Official Situ to advise me on when the rule stating that the Head Seamstress is not allowed to see the accounts and transactions of her own department was set. Once I understand, I will follow it strictly." *Rules are good. Rules are fair.*

"This..." Lady Li did not dare to give anymore excuses. "Head Seamstress Fu, of course you can see the accounts. In the next two days, I will find it and hand it over to you."

Fu Rou kept it short. "I want it tomorrow morning."

Lady Li was reluctant. "Understood."

Not only did Fu Rou want the ledger, she also wanted to check all the records. She found out that the Seamstress Department often procrastinated. She intended to make use of three rotational shifts to rush out the embroidery pieces that were already delayed and get rid of this bad habit. Expectedly, her subordinates were not pleased and wanted Fu Rou to speak to Lady Li before doing so.

Fu Rou naturally did not discuss this with Lady Li but instead called Lady Li's subordinate, Attendant Yuan. On the surface, she called Attendant Yuan to go through the accounts with her. In actuality, Fu Rou wanted to find out the truth. "The numbers don't match. The amount of gold sheets used for embroidery is different from the amount of gold sheets stated." Fu Rou flipped the ledger.

"The accounts are very complicated. Head Seamstress Fu, could it be that you missed out something? It definitely won't be less." Attendant Yuan was surprised. She was similar to Lady Li and thought that Fu Rou only knew how to embroider and would not be able to detect

any foul play.

Fu Rou replied with an oh sound as she instructed Shu'er to bring an abacus over. Using the abacus, she did the calculations in front of Attendant Yuan.

"From the start of the year until the last record, there are five less bundles of gold sheets, twelve missing bundles of gold curls, two pairs of first grade brocades and..."

Attendant Yuan knelt on the ground as her face was anxious. "Head Seamstress Fu, there are many people in the Seamstress Department. You cannot blame me for the missing items in the account book."

Fu Rou smiled. "You are saying this but the words are written by you. Could it be my fault then?"

"This...Lady Li ordered me to do it." *When trouble comes, even couples separate. Why would she care about someone else when she herself was in danger?*

"Are you trying to put the blame on your superior after you made a mistake?" Fu Rou was determined to take her down.

"No, no! I am really not trying to push the blame. The items that are missing on the account book were really taken by Lady Li." Attendant Yuan's mouth loosened. "A portion of it was given to the attendants and palace maids in the Seamstress Department in order to win them over. The rest was used by Lady Li to make clothes for herself. All the clothes she made are in her trunk. Head Seamstress Fu, if you bring someone to check, you will definitely find it. It is evidence that Lady Li stole the Ministry of Work's materials."

"Every year, everyone in the Ministry of Works will have clothes given to them. Why would Lady Li want to risk getting caught to make other clothes for herself?" Fu Rou could not understand.

"Head Seamstress Fu may not know but Lady Li has always wished to gain the Emperor's favour and propel her status. That is why she has been preparing luxurious clothes for herself in secret. She wants to

find an opportunity to seduce the Emperor. She is very ambitious.” Attendant Yuan spilled everything.

Fu Rou smiled. Her intuition was correct. It would be easier to handle if Lady Li was not in the Seamstress Department. After all, one wanted to reach for the skies while the other wanted to stay on the ground. They should not clash to begin with.

Court Lady

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When Lady Li entered her room, she was startled to see Fu Rou waiting for her. The lid to her clothes trunk was wide open. Numerous sets of beautiful gowns, glimmered under the candlelight blinding her.

Lady Li's face paled. "Head Seamstress Fu, what a good strategy. I had looked down on you since you were new. However, schemes and tricks are common in the Royal Palace. Although I have lost, I will not beg you for forgiveness. You can dream on."

Fu Rou lightly caressed one of the gowns next to her. "Your skills are pretty good. But when will you ever have the chance to wear them? As someone from the Ministry of Works, we have a fixed uniform. Even if you made more for yourself, wearing them will be going against the rule. What a waste of effort. Moreover, the harem is filled with ladies in elaborate gowns, what have the Emperor not seen before? Displaying your own originality might be the only way to move the Emperor. Lady Li, you have chosen wrongly."

Lady Li frowned. She could not sense any mockery from Fu Rou's tone. It seemed as if Fu Rou was trying to tell her to use a different approach. *What was the meaning of this?*

Fu Rou carried on. "Although embroidery is a small skill, it cannot be overlooked. Let's take the colour gold as an example. Initially,

threads were dyed gold to brighten up embroideries. Soon, people thought that the colour was not bright enough and threads made out of gold were introduced. After that, gold sheets and gold curls started to come up. From two different shades of gold to four different shades of gold. They were combined to form colourful sheets. This is how the golden brocades eventually became stunning.”

Lady Li had second thoughts. “Head Seamstress Fu, your knowledge in embroidery far surpasses me. But so what? There is a difference between a winner and a loser. Even if you are magnanimous and forgive me, I cannot remain in the Seamstress Department and continue working under you.”

“Lady Li, you are right. After this, your time in the Seamstress Department is limited. Hence, so that we won’t have to continue meeting each other awkwardly, you should hurry and find the correct path.” Fu Rou stood up and walked towards the door. When she passed Lady Li, she said, “Other than colour, light rays can also attract someone’s attention. If incorporated seamlessly, it can reflect elegant and clear waves. That will have greater certainty.”

Deep in thought, Lady Li turned her head and looked out. The small lamp that Fu Rou held outlined her figure, making her look slim and supple. In that moment, Lady Li understood.

After a few days, Fu Rou purposely brought Lady Li along when she went to deliver a spice pouch to the Emperor. Two of them went but only one returned. Lady Li wore a robe that was identical to every other palace lady. However, when the light shone on her robe, light rays reflected off it delicately, attracting the Emperor’s attention. The Emperor then requested for her to stay behind. The following day, Lady Li returned in a sedan. She had received the Emperor’s favour and was conferred the title Baolin.

Everyone except Fu Rou was extremely shocked.

When everyone else left, Lady Li entered Fu Rou’s residence and bowed to her deeply. “It is only because of you, Head Seamstress Fu, that I got to where I am today. You are straightforward, generous and considerate. I admire you.”

Fu Rou rushed to help her stand. “Now that you are Baolin, I cannot accept your greeting. It is not like we have a lot of animosity between us to begin with. Isn’t this much better?” The truth was that Fu Rou actually admired her as well. Lady Li knew how to handle accounts as well as embroidery. She also knew how to win over the masses.

Lady Li smiled as well. “We both got what we wanted. It is indeed better.” Her tone changed to one filled with guilt. “Do you remember me giving you a book when you first came? I was muddled then and gave you a fake book. If you follow the book to try and please the Concubines and Princesses, you will definitely get in trouble. However, I have another book here. I no longer have any use for it. On the other hand, this might help you.”

Fu Rou thanked her.

“Is this the water lily that Concubine Yan requested for?” Lady Li noticed Fu Rou’s embroidery rack. There was a half completed, elaborate pink water lily. Although the embroidery was clearly skilled, it made her frown.

Fu Rou noticed her reaction. “Please do not hesitate to teach me.”

“Seamstress Fu, you have to treat this matter carefully.” Since Lady Li dared to aim for a higher status, she clearly had the skill needed to survive. She was particularly observant when it came to the undercurrents of things. “You were chosen by the Empress to enter the Ministry of Works because of your peony screen. If you do not embroider this well, you will offend Concubine Yan. However, if you do it too well, you will offend the Empress.”

Fu Rou froze as a cold shiver ran up her spine. She did not think much into this task and thought that Concubine Yan simply wanted to see her skills. Thankfully, she was lucky and helped Lady Li. In return, Lady Li had saved her. The Royal Palace was full of traps, any wrong step and she could fall into deep trouble. *That was so close!*

The Crown Prince visited the Han Mansion again. He did not know why but he could not stop thinking of the show on Zhao Zilong’s

Seven Charges into Changbanpo. When he entered the Main Hall, he saw that Prince Han had a guest.

“Crown Prince, you are here.” Prince Han greeted with a huge smile plastered on his face. The guest turned and immediately stood up to greet him. “Your Highness.”

Animosity flashed through the Crown Prince’s eyes when he saw who the guest was. It was not because the guest had a handsome face, nor was it because the guest was giving off an impressive appearance. It was simply because it was Prince Zhou.

Prince Zhou was the son of Concubine Yan. When he had come of age, he had gone to his own prefecture and would not attend court unless there was something on. However, it was almost the Empress’ birthday and the Crown Prince was about to get married. The Emperor had hence called Prince Zhou over to celebrate. The Crown Prince remembered that the Imperial order had just been sent out. In such a short time, Prince Zhou had already arrived at Chang’an. He wondered what exactly Prince Zhou was trying to do.

On the surface, the three brothers could get along but their relationship was not deep. The Emperor and the Empress had gone through numerous challenges together to get to where they were now and the Emperor was extremely respectful to the Empress. However, when it came to feelings, the Emperor preferred Concubine Yan. Prince Zhou, the Crown Prince and Prince Han were hence destined to never be able to treat each other like real brothers.

Even when it came to hunting, the atmosphere between the two brothers and the three brothers were vastly different. The Crown Prince was clearly more competitive when it came to Prince Zhou. Prince Zhou would also not give in and would hunt whatever amount the Crown Prince managed to hunt. Prince Han could see through their relationship but did not interfere. After all, the Crown Prince was his biological brother and Prince Zhou had never offended him either.

The Crown Prince smiled. “It is a great thing that your archery skills improved, as long as you don’t shoot into Chang’an.”

Prince Zhou smiled along. “Crown Prince, you must be joking.”

“Of course, I am joking. Father’s power stretches over tens of thousands of miles. Who would dare shoot into Chang’an?” There was a deeper meaning in the Crown Prince’s words. “This hunt is not over, the winner is not decided until it ends. Come, let us compete to see who can hunt more animals!”

The Crown Prince shot off first as he headed straight into the depths of the forest, leaving everyone far behind. Although he thought that he had made a smart move, he never thought that he would bump into Chen Ji. This lad just loved to sleep on trees.

Chen Ji was lying comfortably as he snored in his sleep, making even the Crown Prince jealous. The Crown Prince immediately shot three consecutive arrows. He completely forgot about the contest he was having with Prince Zhou.

Chen Ji was jolted awake as he jumped up from the branch and nimbly moved to dodge the arrows. He landed on the ground gracefully. He lifted his head only to see the Crown Prince.

“Oh, so it is Your Highness.” Chen Ji’s expression fell. *It seems like he has turned into a living target. He cannot come here anymore.*

“Chen Ji, are you slacking off on the tree again?” The Crown Prince burst out into laughter.

Chen Ji frowned. “I was simply taking a nap on the tree. It is not considered slacking off.”

The Crown Prince then said, “The way you flipped down from the tree looks pretty impressive.”

Chen Ji did not agree. “They are simply techniques I learnt from acting in martial art shows. After training for so long, they naturally look good.”

“Flip a few more times for me to see.” The Crown Prince ordered.

Chen Ji muttered, “I am not a monkey.”

The Crown Prince did not hear him clearly. “What?”

Chen Ji replied loudly, “Yes, Your Highness.” He then did two somersaults backwards. “Are you satisfied, Your Highness?”

“I am not satisfied.” The Crown Prince could tell that he was just doing the bare minimum. “Go back and prepare, I want to watch Zhao Zilong’s Seven Charges into Changbanpo.”

“That show again?”

From afar, the horn sounded. The Crown Prince recalled that the hunt had not ended and immediately turned to leave. He urged Chen Ji, “Hurry and go!”

Chen Ji sighed as he turned and left the mountain. He knew when he could relax and when he should not. To others, it may seem like his life wasn’t worth much but he was willing to put aside his pride.

Court Lady

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Meanwhile, ever since Fu Rou entered the palace Sheng Chumu had been feeling depressed. He spent all day either training or studying military tactics. He even dragged his two other brothers along with him.

Sheng Chumu's two brothers were tortured by him but they could not complain. Eventually they managed to drag Sheng Chumu to the wine house in an attempt to distract him. Alas, the wine was medicine as Sheng Chumu's mood improved vastly. As the three brothers went happily to settle the bill, they bumped into Lu Qi and his guests.

"Brother Lu, what a coincidence." Sheng Chumu suddenly burned with anger. *If not for Lu Yunji, his Fu Rou would not have entered the palace.*

"Of course it is a coincidence. Enemies always meet." Lu Qi's expression was filled with malice as he started tugging on his sleeve. "Sheng Chumu, you ruined my sister's reputation by spouting nonsense in front of the Crown Prince!"

"What can I do if your sister has a birthmark?" Sheng Chumu intentionally shouted this loudly. He wanted the entire Chang'an to know!

"I am going to kill you!" Lu Qi brandished his fist as he dashed

towards Sheng Chumu. He was, however, persuaded by his other guests to bear with it until they could carry out their challenge in front of the Imperial Judge.

Sheng Chumu seemed to have suddenly thought of something. “The challenge was meant for Fu Rou. What has it got to do with your sister?”

It was rare that Lu Qi thought Sheng Chumu made sense. “Okay, then let’s set another one.”

“Then let’s do it now.” Sheng Chumu had been bored out of his mind. *Now that Lu Qi was right in front of him, how could he easily pass up this chance to teach him a lesson?*

“Fine, let’s fight now. If you lose, you better take back every single word you said about my sister.” Lu Qi narrowed his eyes.

“If you lose, you better kneel and kowtow in front of our Duke Lu Residence and shout like father like son.” Sheng Chumu was a filial child. It was not that he didn’t intend to repay his parents, but the time was not right.

The two agreed and chose a room to fight in. Lu Qi had a lot of guests and Sheng Chumu’s two younger brothers were not able to squeeze past the door initially. At the start, they could only hear the sounds of fists and footsteps. However, their elder brother got kicked three times and flew out of the room. It was only then that they found out the miserable state of the fight from their brother’s bruised face.

After the third kick, Lu Qi chased Sheng Chumu out and placed a foot on his chest as if he was stepping on an ant. “Are you going to say it?”

Sheng Chumu shouted, “I will say it! I will say it! The Lu family’s younger daughter is pure. I heard about the birthmark on her lower back from the servant of the lady from the He family.”

Lu Qi snorted, “Only when you get beaten up then do you know it hurts.”

Sheng Chumu looked to be in a sorry state as he crawled up. He called out for Lu Qi who had turned to leave. Lu Qi sneered, "What? Do you want another beating?"

Sheng Chumu stuttered slightly, "I am warning you. I will win you in the actual challenge!"

Lu Qi guffawed, "Haha! I will bet a thousand taels that I will beat you up ten times more than today."

Sheng Chumu answered back stubbornly and mumbled, "I...upon the Duke Lu Residence...bet ten thousand taels that I will defeat you!"

With the encouragement of the Lu family's guests, Lu Qi decided to make the bet bigger. Someone opened a bet, others placed their bets. The entire wine house was bustling with activity. As the three brothers from the Sheng family witnessed everyone betting on Lu Qi, they silently left.

"Elder Brother, who cares if no one else bets on you. I will bet on you." After considering it for half a day, Sheng Chuling decided to donate his allowance.

"Elder Brother, I will also bet on you." Sheng Chujun did not want to be left behind. However, he felt embarrassed. "It is just that I don't have much taels."

Pa pa. Sheng Chumu hit his two brothers, his eyes were burning. "What kind of expressions are you all wearing? Are you certain that I will lose?"

Sheng Chuling saw how his elder brother did not look at all dispirited and his eyes lit up. "Elder Brother, did you put on a show?"

Sheng Chumu gave an obvious look. "Obviously! If I did not use my body to show them, would they have fallen for my trap and started the bet?" *It was all part of his plan.* "With the small amount of money you all have, you will only be able to win peanuts. We have to find a bigger investment."

Sheng Chuling's eyes lit up. "Do you mean -- from Mother?"

Sheng Chujun became excited. "Right, right, Mother has money!"

"Not only money, she has the house deed, land contract and farm contract." Seeing how his younger brothers got more and more excited, Sheng Chumu became more determined.

Sheng Chumu was no longer his ignorant self anymore. If Lu Qi could not see this, then he could not blame Sheng Chumu for not having mercy. If the Lu family did not lose at least eighty thousand taels, it would not be able to ease his heartbreak!

At this very moment, Fu Rou was completely oblivious of the huge bet that Sheng Chumu had started in Chang'an. She brought the embroidered screen and was heading to Concubine Yan's palace.

There was a luxuriously dressed man sitting beside Concubine Yan. On his robe was a silver python piercing through the clouds embroidered on it. Fu Rou immediately associated him to be Concubine Yan's son, Prince Zhou. She took another look at him and realised that both mother and son resembled each other. They were both good looking.

Concubine Yan laughed, "The Seamstress Department has always been slow in their duties. With the new Head Seamstress, their speed is now incredible. How can they finish embroidering so quickly?"

Sensing the praise in his mother's voice, Prince Zhou became curious as to who this Head Seamstress was. He examined Fu Rou.

Fu Rou maintained a stable voice, sounding neither proud nor impatient. "I promised that I will do it so I will do my best." She then turned back to signal to the palace maids to reveal the screen that was covered by a red cloth. A pure and clean lotus was blooming. The embroidery was done only in black and white, yet, it was breathtaking.

"There is nothing to pick on with regard to the embroidery skill." Concubine Yan, however, became overly-sensitive. "But why are

there only two colours, black and white? Could it be that the Seamstress Department has run out of all other coloured threads? Even the gold and silver threads? Or do you, Head Seamstress Fu, think that my screen is not worthy of using good materials?"

"Concubine Yan is extremely precious and no amount of good material can be compared to you. The reason why I chose to only use black and white is because it would be able to bring out the unique charm of the lotus. The peony is the king of flowers and is bright and mesmerising. Hence, when embroidering the peony, I used multicoloured threads as well as gold and silver threads to bring out its majestic look. Whereas the lotus flower is born from the mud, yet it is not covered in mud. It maintains its clean and pristine state as it greets the world. It is extremely clean and other than white, what other colour would best represent the purity of the lotus flower? The colour with the greatest contrast to white is black. After considering for a long time, I decided to use black and white to embroider the lotus flower that Your Highness loves."

Prince Zhou was concentrated on Fu Rou as she spoke her mind.

Concubine Yan did not notice her son's attention and pondered for a few moments. "After hearing what you said, it is reasonable. It seems like I have placed the Seamstress Department in a difficult spot when I requested for you to sew this lotus screen. Alright, since the colourful peony has already been done, then my lotus flower can remain simple and elegant." Her tone suddenly changed. "I asked you to embroider the water lily, why do you keep bringing up the lotus flower?"

"I grew up in Guangzhou and often see my grandparents offer the lotus flower to our ancestors. According to them, the lotus flower is similar but different. The family will only prosper when the entire family is in harmony." Fu Rou tried her best.

"Similar but different, living in harmony..." Concubine Yan smiled, "I understand. Head Seamstress Fu, you have done well."

Fu Rou silently breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you for the compliment, Concubine Yan. If you have no further instructions for me, I will take my leave."

“Hold up.” Prince Zhou called Fu Rou to stay.

“This is my son, Prince Zhou.” Concubine Yan announced proudly. Fu Rou had already guessed his identity as she proceeded to greet him graciously.

“Head Seamstress Fu, you embroidered the lotus flower beautifully. After looking at it, I liked it so much that I wish for an embroidered pouch. This will be a personal item that I carry and I want you to embroider it by yourself. No one else is allowed to do it.” Prince Zhou’s request was bordering on being rude and he did not know how she would respond.

“I will carry out your order. Your Highness, may I know what design you would like on the pouch?” Fu Rou carried out her responsibilities and treated him respectfully.

“The design can be whatever you think fits. You shall help me decide.”

Seeing how Fu Rou did not look at him, he did not feel good.

“Understood. I will take my leave now.” *This Prince Zhou is really arrogant.*

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Ever since Fu Rou presented the black and white lotus to Concubine Yan, she received rewards from both the Empress and Concubine Yan. All of a sudden, she was famous amongst the 24 departments. The Seamstress Department, which had always been lacking behind, was suddenly highlighted. Everyone was impressed by Fu Rou and the three-shift system that she implemented to rush out embroideries. The atmosphere was great.

Fu Rou was not arrogant but through this, she learnt that life in the palace was not easy. She had to be careful and do things herself. She was so busy she did not have time to think of Sheng Chumu. One day, as she was delivering embroideries, she saw a group of internal attendants talking behind a fake mountain. The two words “Sheng Chumu” floated into her ears, causing her to slow down.

She had no time to think of Sheng Chumu recently. She wondered what he would think if he knew. Would he try to remind her of himself through others? Fu Rou wanted to laugh as she walked over. Ultimately, she could not suppress the concern she felt.

“Why is everyone betting on Lu Qi? If all bets are on him, how is Chief Cao going to survive? We need some people to bet on Sheng Chumu right?” The one who was leading the talk was an internal attendant named Yang Bo. He had an attractive pair of doggy eyes.

When Fu Rou first entered the palace, it was Yang Bo that showed her the way. It was thanks to him that she found out roughly about the people in the palace and was not completely oblivious.

Fu Rou suddenly chimed in, "What are you all doing?"

"Eh? Head Seamstress Fu!" Yang Bo threw everyone else a look and the other internal attendants dispersed like birds. "Nothing much. We were just chatting." Yang Bo wanted to collect the bets but he stumbled over himself and dropped them.

Fu Rou laughed as she helped him pick up the silver coins. "It is alright. I heard everything. What is going on between Lu Qi and Sheng Chumu?"

"Since you already know, then I shall speak the truth."

Yang Bo had a good impression of Fu Rou and had long heard of what she did at the Seamstress Department. He had thought that Fu Rou would either be controlled or control others. He never thought that she would be able to stabilize her position and even help someone become Baolin. After everything that happened, no one lost out. It was then that he knew that Fu Rou was not like others.

Yang Bo told her the truth. "Recently, a huge bet was made in Chang'an. It is on who would win between Lu Qi and Sheng Chumu. The gambling odds has already reached a ten to one percentage win."

Fu Rou asked, "Who is the one and who is the ten?"

"Are you really asking that?" When Yang Bo trusted someone, there was nothing that he would hide. "Lu Qi was named General Zhenyong by the Emperor. Duke Lu's son would definitely lose against a seasoned general on the battlefield. I originally advised Chief Cao not to take on this gamble. Since the outcome is clear, there is no way for him to make a profit out of this. However, Chief Cao said that a small bet would make everyone happy."

"Chief Cao, the one in charge of internal attendants?" Fu Rou had recently put in effort to identify everyone. It was not so that she

could get into their good books but to prevent herself from making simple mistakes.

“Yes. For this bet, the Lu family is the big dealer in Chang'an while the palace's dealer is Chief Cao. Head Seamstress Fu, please do not spread this and leak it to the higher ups.”

Fu Rou chuckled, “Why would I? I want to join in the fun and bet on Sheng Chumu.”

“Lady Fu, you are a good person. I will give you a piece of advice. There is a ninety-nine percent chance that you will not be able to get your money back by betting on Sheng Chumu.”

“I do not believe in that. I will bet all my earnings in the palace.” Fu Rou strongly believed that the one she liked was a multi-talented and righteous man!

In the blink of an eye, it was the day of the battle.

The Emperor was outstanding in both the literary and martial arts. Even though he had conquered the empire, he believed that guarding his empire was equally important. Hence, he set a date to organise these kinds of events to motivate the younger generation as well as take the opportunity to select and recruit talent.

In the grand courtyard, an observation stand was built for the Emperor and the Empress. Flanking their sides were tents and wooden shelters built to allow officials and nobles to observe the event as well as rest. Short colourful curtains segregated the battle arenas as well as defined the walking area. Internal attendants walked between the arenas. Higher ranked military officers acted as judges. The winner of each battle will proceed to the next round while the loser would be eliminated. The top ten would then proceed to the second round of horse riding and archery. The two with the best scores would then move onto the final round.

Although Sheng Chumu boasted to Fu Rou before, it was the first time he treated the Imperial Competition so seriously. In addition, his

opponents looked down on him and that actually gave him a huge advantage. He surmounted all difficulties and silently made his way into the top ten.

Sheng Chuling was ready to cheer for his elder brother till his throat was sore. However, he never thought that Sheng Chumu would complete the competition so quickly. He was bored and decided to wander about. All of a sudden, he saw a familiar face and took big steps into a tent.

“I finally found you! Wow, you actually hid in the palace!!” Sheng Chuling pointed at her.

There were two women in the tent. The one that was sitting had her hair in a bun, with a gem-shaped peony pin in her hair. She was wearing a snow-white velvet winter skirt and a white fox fur coat as she held a warmer in her hands. The one standing behind her was clearly her personal palace maid. Sheng Chuling was pointing at the one who was sitting.

The palace maid immediately scolded him, “How brazen! How dare you be so rude to Her Highness?”

Sheng Chuling jumped in shock, “Princess? Aren't you Qing...” He then saw her luxurious outfit.

“I am Princess Xinnan.” Princess Xinnan tilted her head upward. “Sheng Chuling, pour me a cup of tea.”

Bewildered, Sheng Chuling pointed at his own nose and said, “Me? Pour tea?”

“Yes.” Princess Xinnan raised her eyebrows, mimicking Sheng Chuling as she spoke in a bossy tone. “Which residence are you from? You are so slow.”

Scrunching his nose together, Sheng Chuling obediently poured a cup of tea for the princess.

Xinnan observed his smooth actions and remarked, “You are pretty good at this. I thought you were a klutz.”

Sheng Chuling laughed lightly, “Thank you for your praise, Your Highness. By the customs of the Duke Lu Residence, anyone who pours a good cup of tea would be rewarded with a big kiss.”

Princess Xinnan choked on her tea, unable to stop herself. *This guy was really incorrigible!* She was the bigger person and was not intending to hold it against him.

“However, the princess has a distinguished status and is like a golden branch with jade leaves. Her reputation cannot be tarnished and she cannot kiss anyone she likes. Am I right?” Sheng Chuling smiled deviously.

“Ab...absurd!” Zhenzhu blinked her eyes in horror, “How can you speak to Her Highness in such a manner!”

Princess Xinnan lightly yelled, “Leave us alone!”

Zhenzhu nodded fiercely, “Yes, go away!”

Princess Xinnan coughed, “I meant you, Zhenzhu!” Although Zhenzhu was someone that she trusted, no one else could know that Sheng Chuling had kissed her.

Zhenzhu was extremely surprised and could only oblige.

“Threatening the royal princess of the imperial family is a crime deserving of death.” Princess Xinnan watched as Sheng Chuling swaggered over to the seat beside hers and sat down. Princess Xinnan’s expression darkened. If she had known that this would happen, she would not have gone to the Han Mansion!

“Stealing the royal princess’ first kiss is also a crime deserving of death. What’s done has been done, another crime added is nothing much. The Emperor cannot kill the same person twice anyway.” Sheng Chuling shrugged confidently.

He received a glare from Princess Xinnan. “How did you know... that was my first kiss?”

“You were so nervous. How can it not be your first kiss?” Sheng Chuling casually replied.

“You...you!” Princess Xinnan’s face flushed red from anger.

“What about me? Did you think that I was very happy? I completely regret it.” Sheng Chuling sighed heavily as if he had degraded himself.

“Bastard! You lowly person took advantage of me. How dare you say you regret it?” Princess Xinnan could not believe what she was hearing.

“Of course I regret it. I met a beautiful, innocent lady in the Han Mansion and I thought I was a good match with her. I originally thought she was an attendant and wanted to marry her as my consort. Who knew that she was actually the highly esteemed princess. If I knew about that, I would never have kissed her. I would have preferred if this ill-fated relationship did not happen in the first place. That would be better than the bitterness of my broken heart now.” When he got home, he kept thinking of her. His luck was too bad.

“What ill-fated relationship? You make it sound so horrible.” Princess Xinnan covered her ears.

“If you think I speak horribly, then we should not meet anymore. We should not talk with each other and should not kiss.” Sheng Chuling stood up to head outside.

Princess Xinnan slammed the table. “Stop right there! Where are you going?”

However, Sheng Chuling did not turn around. “Your Highness is the beloved daughter of the Emperor while I am just the second son of Duke Lu. Our statuses are very different and we should not delay each other further. I will keep the beloved memory of that fragrant cup of tea and gentle kiss forever in my heart.”

Princess Xinnan was stunned and the anger in her heart dissipated. A sweet feeling overwhelmed her as she felt tingly on the inside. Her heart was pounding wildly.

On the other hand, the seemingly relaxed Sheng Chuling’s knees

immediately grew weak the moment he turned the corner. He leaned against the wall and breathed heavily while thumping his chest.

“Oh my goodness! That damn woman is actually a princess. Thank goodness I am familiar and experienced in dealing with girls. She would not complain to the Empress about me after I said those sweet words, right?”

Eight episodes of the drama have already been released on youtube! The next episode will be airing at 8pm China time, on Thursday. Chapters will resume then.

In the meantime, what do you think of the novel so far? It may sound silly and lighthearted for now, but there will be A LOT more depth and juicy content later on!

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Meanwhile, the horse archery contest was about to end.

Surprisingly, Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi were both able to hit all fifteen targets. Even the Emperor took notice of Sheng Chumu's spectacular performance. After learning that Sheng Chumu was Sheng Xiaojing's eldest son, he was surprised but also glad.

When the horse archery contest ended, Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi had the highest scores and the both of them set to compete in the final round.

A few palace servants pulled two horses towards the arena. Sheng Chumu observed one of Lu Qi's underlings coming from the same direction and could not help feeling suspicious as his eyes narrowed. The Lu family's father and son pair was vicious. At this critical juncture, the opponent's servant went to the stables. This could not just be a coincidence. He thought of something and called his own guards. He instructed them to find a horse that had a similar pelt colour. He ordered them to swap the horse with the one that he was supposed to use.

Very soon, the drums started to beat, signalling the start of the contest. Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi stood at opposite ends. Whipping their horses, they dashed towards each other. In the beginning, the two seemed to be on par in terms of strength as they exchanged

blows. Dust and soil circled around the fight and the Emperor nodded in satisfaction at the intensity of the battle. All of a sudden, Sheng Chumu's horse seemed to lose its footing, causing him to appear to loosen his grip on the reins. Lu Qi caught onto the opportunity and rushed forward, excited to attack.

Unexpectedly, Sheng Chumu turned around sharply and threw a blow towards Lu Qi's chest. Without time to react, Lu Qi fell off his horse. Silence engulfed the arena as the winner had been decided.

After a moment, Sheng Xiaojing cheered loudly, "Brilliant!" Everyone regained their senses and praised Sheng Chumu's actions.

"Aiyo, Duke Chen!" Sheng Xiaojing boasted towards Lu Yunji, "I heard your family proudly opened a gambling bet with a ten to one winning odds against my son winning. My Duke Lu Residence followed along and bet our land contract, house deed, market agreements and gold. When we get our winnings, we will be able to have feasts for every meal for a few years. I have to thank you for your generosity, Duke Chen. Tonight, I will personally head to your residence. Do remember to place your orders."

Sheng Chumu's two younger brothers had really listened to their elder brother and stole their house's valuables out to bet. Madam Sheng was furious while Sheng Xiaojing urged them on. He even took out his own personal stash. Today, the Duke Lu Residence was rich because of the bet. This was what it meant to win on the surface and still have substance. *Feels good!*

Lu Yunji acted like he did not care but he was bursting inside. He could not believe it. It was as if Sheng Chumu was an entirely different person. He was too careless.

The Emperor was oblivious to the fight between his two beloved officials and called Sheng Chumu. He wanted to test Sheng Chumu further. He asked Sheng Chumu how many grades of armor he could pierce through.

Sheng Chumu immediately understood what the Emperor meant and bravely asked to try.

The internal attendants cleared the grounds and set up a seventh grade armor a hundred meters away. Sheng Chumu drew his arrow and shot at it without hesitation, instantly piercing through the seventh grade heavy armor. This time, the crowd cheered wildly for him. Sheng Chumu was not surprised. He had gone through numerous beatings to achieve this result in Wudi Manor.

The Emperor was satisfied. "That was a good shot. It was able to pierce through the seventh-grade armor. From today onwards, I want to see who dares to call you Chang'an's top playboy."

Sheng Chumu laughed lightly, "I have corrected my playful ways already."

The Emperor nodded. "Know your mistakes and you can correct them. Duke Lu can retire with ease with such an outstanding son."

"Your Majesty, I am very happy with my son. However, Duke Chen's son is not bad either. He came in second after all." Sheng Xiaojing could finally let go of all his bottled up anger against the Lu family.

"Admittedly, my son cannot compare to Duke Lu's son. Sheng Chumu is outstanding in all aspects of horse riding and archery and he takes after Duke Lu in the past. It is Your Majesty's blessing that we have such great talents. I request for Your Majesty to make Sheng Chumu an assistant general under me. I believe that in a few years' time, I can nurture him to become a silver bullet for Great Tang!" Lu Yunji devised a plan very quickly.

The Emperor was drawn in by his proposal and he gave his order, "Duke Chen has made many contributions and is loyal to the country. I am proud and glad. The generals that have served me in the past are now old and the new generation must take over. Sheng Chumu, I appoint you as General Dingyuan. You will serve Duke Chen as his assistant general and follow his lead to bring prosperity to the country."

Sheng Xiaojing froze, cursing Lu Yunji in his head. *How vicious, was he trying to kill his son?*

Sheng Chumu acted smoothly as he accepted the royal decree. He

was thinking of making a contribution and then asking His Majesty to bestow marriage for him and Fu Rou.

Candles were burning as the palace gradually became silent.

The new moon was out tonight and there were little stars in the sky. A small light, like a firefly, suddenly appeared at the end of the pitch black corridor. When the light came nearer, it turned out to be a candlelight. As the candle was covered with a translucent cloth, it could only make out two hazy figures. If one were not focused, one would not be able to spot them.

“Head Seamstress Fu, you are really lucky. Recently, the Emperor and Empress has been advocating to be frugal and a lot of corridors are not lit at night. If not for this, there would be no use begging Chief Cao.” The one speaking was Yang Bo.

When Fu Rou heard that Sheng Chumu was going to be sent out to battle, she gave up her winnings and begged Chief Cao to help her think of a way to meet Sheng Chumu. Chief Cao was initially troubled on how he would pay Fu Rou. But now, in less than an hour, all he needed to do was to pull some strings and get someone to open one of the palace gates.

“Thank you, Yang Bo.” Fu Rou was filled with gratitude.

“It is nothing, you don’t have to thank me.” Yang Bo admired Fu Rou. She was one of the few capable people. “Later when you meet him, hurry and say what you need to say. Just say a few short sentences. Even with Chief Cao, this is still against the palace rules and if we get caught, the punishment is death.”

Fu Rou lowered her head and made a sound of acknowledgement. She could hardly hide the excitement in her eyes. They had already reached the gate and Sheng Chumu was on the other side.

Yang Bo opened a small door and greeted the guard that was standing guard outside. The guard had made sure that there would not be anyone at this time. They then stood as a lookout. Yang Bo let

Fu Rou out.

A black figure immediately rushed in front of her before coming to a stop. Fu Rou looked at the face, still slightly bruised from the fight. Her fingers curled into a fist to conceal her concerns as a warm smile appeared on her face.

“Rou’er!” Sheng Chumu was excited. Yang Bo jumped and immediately shushed him. “Oh my god, lower your voice.”

Sheng Chumu listened to him and lowered his voice. “I thought I wouldn’t get to see you before I leave.”

Fu Rou bit her lip. “I am scared.”

Sheng Chumu held onto Fu Rou’s hand and realised that she was clenching her fists. He gently pried opened her fingers and placed his palm against hers. “I am not scared.”

Glancing at Yang Bo by the side, Fu Rou took back her hands. Sheng Chumu murmured, “After you entered the palace, you won’t even let me touch your hands. Luckily I managed to kiss you that night and got some benefits.”

Fu Rou muttered, “As long as you return safely, I will let you take advantage of me all you want.”

Sheng Chumu’s ears perked up. “What?”

“Nothing.” Fu Rou took out a spice pouch. “Here.”

Sheng Chumu took the spice pouch and flipped it over, examining the embroidery. “What love letter have you hidden in this?”

Fu Rou laughed. “Indecent.” *He was so smooth. Even when he goes to the battlefield, he should be able to survive.*

Sheng Chumu grinned. “You haven’t seen me when I am indecent. When I get back, you will find out.”

Fu Rou stared deeply into his eyes. “Are you promising me that you will return?”

Sheng Chumu raised his hand up to the sky. "I swear."

Yang Bo noticed that the guards patrolling the area were heading towards them soon as he rushed them. "Let's go. Stop being clingy. You said what you needed to say and gave what you wanted to give. It is not like you can leave together."

Seeing how Fu Rou did not move, Yang Bo's heart pounded and he had no choice but to drag her with him.

Fu Rou kept looking back, unwillingly to leave. She silently mouthed the words - *I will wait*. Sheng Chumu held the spice pouch tightly in his hands and brought it to his heart, nodding wordlessly. They solemnly exchanged promises.

Court Lady

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The Crown Prince was riding wildly in the forest, feeling extremely troubled and confused.

Yesterday was his mother's birthday but his father, the Emperor, kept on praising Prince Zhou. The Emperor kept saying that Prince Zhou reminded him of himself and even criticised the Crown Prince for being too hasty. This morning, his mother had requested for him to enter the palace and reprimanded him. *His father was biased and everything Prince Zhou did was right, whereas everything he did was wrong. What could he do about it?*

Unknowingly, his horse had run out of the woods. A dark-blue secluded lake lay before him with a dense mountain in the background, seeming like the light at the end of a tunnel. The Crown Prince's heart slowly settled into a peaceful state. He dismounted and started to take a stroll by the lake. All of a sudden, he saw someone fishing leisurely by the lake. The tip of the bamboo rod jolted slightly and the person immediately pulled on the fishing rod. A ripple formed on the surface of the water as a fish appeared.

However, the Crown Prince did not expect the tug on the rod to be so strong such that the fish would end up flying towards him. The fish hit him, wetting his clothes and left him smelling like fish.

The Crown Prince was about to get angry but saw that Chen Ji was

the person that was fishing.

Chen Ji recognised the Crown Prince and froze. He suddenly remembered that he had to greet him, “Gree—”

The Crown Prince waved his hand. “There is no need for formalities.” He sat on the spot that Chen Ji had occupied earlier. “Just treat me like everyone else.”

Chen Ji hesitated.

“I came out to distract myself, you may continue fishing.” The Crown Prince patted the grass patch beside him.

“I have finished fishing and would not wish to disrupt your peace.” Chen Ji wanted to leave. *He did not know why he kept bumping into this person wherever he went. Was there anywhere in Chang’an that was still peaceful?*

“Sit down.” The Crown Prince lowered his voice. Chen Ji made an mmhm sound before sitting, but secretly rolled his eyes. He arranged his rod and continued fishing.

Soon, another ripple appeared on the surface of the water. The Crown Prince shouted, “There’s a fish!”

Chen Ji shook his head. “It is not a fish.

“What do you know!” The Crown Prince grabbed the fishing rod and lifted it. There was nothing at the end of the line. Chen Ji was speechless. *If he, an experienced fisherman, knew nothing, then was this esteemed prince supposed to know better?*

“Even fishes in a lake can be so sneaky.” The Crown Prince shoved the fishing rod back into Chen Ji’s hands. “Continue.”

Chen Ji took his time. “I think—” *we should forget it.*

The Crown Prince cut him off, “Continue until you catch a fish. Haven’t you heard of perseverance?”

Day was turning to night as a sunset covered the sky. The Crown

Prince refused to give up as he tried repeatedly to pull at the fishing rod. However, no fish fell prey to the rod. On the other hand, his stomach started to growl. Chen Ji glanced sideways.

“Don’t look at me. I am the Crown Prince. Even if I was hungry, my stomach would not growl in an uncivilised manner.”

Chen Ji’s face twitched. “Fine, that was me.”

The Crown Prince ordered, “Go and prepare the fish.”

“The fish is so small. What is there to prepare?” At this moment, Chen Ji really missed the Han Mansion.

“Just prepare it. Who ask you to be so lousy at fishing.” The Crown Prince had been looking forward to gorging himself.

“My fishing skills are poor? Who is the one that kept pulling on the fishing rod and scaring away all the fishes?” Chen Ji felt wronged.

“I am the Crown Prince. Why would I pull on someone else’s fishing rod without reason?”

“You...” Chen Ji forced himself to say, “Fine! You are the Crown Prince. Everything you do is right.” He stood up and lifted a small bucket. He could only accept his fate.

The Crown Prince watched as Chen Ji carried over dry twigs, creating a roasting rack. As he started the fire, the Crown Prince looked on curiously. But when Chen Ji asked if he wanted to help, he replied with, “A nobleman does not step into the kitchen.”

“That’s right, you are the Crown Prince. The most noble of noblemen.” Chen Ji rubbed his nose as he roasted the fish. Soon, the smell of grilled fish wafted through the air. Chen Ji held the roasting stick and brought the fish close to his nose, sniffing the delicious smell. Soon, he heard two dry coughs and he sighed. *What was this called? He was making wedding clothes for others to wear!*

Chen Ji offered the grilled fish respectfully. “Please have it.”

The Crown Prince did not stand on ceremony as he bit into it happily.

All of a sudden, he froze. He handed the grilled fish back to Chen Ji.

Is it uncooked? Chen Ji wondered.

“As the Crown Prince of Great Tang, would I eat it by myself? Instead of enjoying by myself, we should enjoy it together. Let’s eat.”

Chen Ji was surprised. As he looked at the Crown Prince’s serious expression, he took a bite out of the grilled fish. He then stopped and looked at the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince moved closed and took a bite while the fish was still in Chen Ji’s hand. “Delicious!”

The two of them took turns taking bites, feeling extremely satisfied. After they were done, Chen Ji asked, “Your Highness, what troubles do you have?”

“Since when did I say I was troubled?” The Crown Prince refused to admit.

“You must be troubled, that’s why you came out to distract yourself. As a performer, we survive from our audience enjoying our shows. We somewhat know how to sense people’s feelings.”

The Crown Prince spouted out, “I have too many younger brothers.”

Chen Ji suddenly dug a hole. The Crown Prince walked beside Chen Ji and saw him throw the fish bones in. He could not help but ask curiously, “What are you doing?”

“This fish made a contribution to our stomachs. I can’t leave its bones in the wild for other animals to scavenge. I dug a hole to bury it.”

The Crown Prince shook his head. “To grief over an injury, to take pity for no reason and to feel melancholy is what women do.”

“You are the woman.”

“Say it again!” The Crown Prince got angry.

“You are the Crown Prince and from birth, you wore comfortable clothes and ate good food, receiving love from your parents. You can even feel troubled over your younger brothers. I am an orphan and

have neither parents nor siblings. When I die, I believe that there won't be anyone to help me build a grave either. I am not even comparable to this fish." Chen Ji intentionally made a small mound on top of the buried fish bones.

"Chen Ji, I will help you arrange a grave." The Crown Prince had never made such a sincere promise before. Chen Ji was shocked. "Are you for real? You want to kill me just because I said one wrong sentence?"

"No." The Crown Prince laughed, "You said that you don't have parents or siblings and worry that you won't have a grave after you die, right? I am saying that, on account of you sharing half a grilled fish with me today, if you die in the future, I will help you arrange a grave."

Chen Ji made an oh sound as he remarked blandly, "I am still so young. It will be a long time before I die. If you want to repay me for the fish, you should just reward me with something."

The Crown Prince plucked a jade pendant off his waist. "Take it."

"I am not a robber. I don't think half a grilled fish is worthy of such a precious jade pendant." The truth was he already had a jade pendant.

"Then what do you want?" The Crown Prince did not know what to give him.

"Special privilege." Chen Ji said after thinking. "I am stuck in the Han Mansion every day and it is not easy to get out. Your Highness is Prince Han's elder brother. Could you help me get permission to leave the Han Mansion to relax once in a while?"

"Sure. I will get Prince Han to allow it." It was such a small thing but the Crown Prince did not know why he felt a tinge of pity for Chen Ji. Everyone in the world had problems, he was simply like everyone else.

Thinking of this, the Crown Prince finally relaxed.

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Fu Rou had a nightmare. She dreamt that Lu Yunji schemed against Sheng Chumu and killed him. When she woke, although she knew it was just a dream, she could not fall back asleep. Fu Rou's heart clenched as she left her room to stroll under the moonlight.

“Yan Zifang, don't blame me for calling you again. I am feeling extremely confused now and cannot sleep. Yan Zifang, if you really are the one that sent Chumu to me, please protect him. He has gone to war and will be facing enemies in front and yet he still has to worry about Lu Yunji setting him up from behind. I am very worried for him....”

“Who's there?” A patrolling guard passed by. It was only then did Fu Rou realised that she had subconsciously walked to the Imperial Garden. She quickly replied, “Head Seamstress Fu Rou from the Ministry of Works.”

The guard checked her Identification Plate but remained suspicious. He wanted to bring her back to the Imperial Guard Quarters to interrogate, Fu Rou felt helpless as she realised that things were getting serious. Prince Zhou suddenly appeared.

“Oh, I am the one that asked her out. It is almost time for Concubine Yan's birthday and I wanted to ask her to embroider something special for me. Because I wanted to keep it a secret, I chose to meet

her in the night. If you all cause a commotion like this, you will leak out my secret and ruin the surprise I prepared for my mother. Will you all be able to take on this responsibility?"

The Imperial guards immediately apologised and let go of Fu Rou.

"Thank you for helping me out, Your Highness." Fu Rou bowed and felt a sharp pain in her elbow.

Prince Zhou examined her carefully. "Are you hurt?"

"Nope." Fu Rou did not want to create any more trouble.

"Those Imperial guards were all specially selected to be the fittest and strongest. You are a lady. It must have been uncomfortable when they held onto you." Prince Zhou suddenly extended his hand and grabbed onto Fu Rou's elbow, where the guards had grabbed her. Fu Rou inhaled sharply.

"And you still say it is nothing?" Prince Zhou stared at Fu Rou's expression as he smiled. "Come to Lingxiao Palace first thing tomorrow morning to get medicine."

Fu Rou turned down his offer. "I do not dare to trouble you, Your Highness. I will just go to the Imperial Physician to get medicine." Although Prince Zhou had helped her, she felt that it was better to stay away from him.

Prince Zhou asked, "What follows after, when bestowed a gift?"

Fu Rou paused. "Do not decline."

"It is good that you are aware. Tomorrow, I will be waiting for you at Lingxiao Palace. If you dare to ignore my order and not turn up, you can wait and see what I will do." Prince Zhou turned and left without waiting for her reply.

Fu Rou was unhappy. *It's such a small issue. Why is Prince Zhou being difficult?* She could not even feel grateful for his help.

The next day, Fu Rou arrived at Lingxiao Palace.

Lingxiao Palace was the residence Prince Zhou stayed at. It was on the opposite side of the Eastern Palace but was close to the Emperor and Concubine Yan's residence. When Lingxiao Palace was first built, the Emperor personally oversaw the construction and put in a lot of effort into the design and furnishing. It was one of the rare few that had a three layer structure. It had the best scenery in the palace and its name meant the skies. It was clear how much the Emperor doted on this son of his.

Fu Rou gazed at the scenery absentmindedly, hesitating at the door.

"You are already here, did you think you could turn and leave so easily?" Prince Zhou hid his smile as delight filled him.

"I thought about it. If Your Highness' medicine comes at a price, I will not be able to accept it. Moreover, I have not stepped in and cannot be considered to have reached." *Sure enough, this was a trap.*

"Even if you do not accept my medicine, you still owe me for the incident at the Imperial Garden." Prince Zhou walked behind the study desk.

Fu Rou stood by the door. "What do you want?"

"Come over, help me prepare ink." Prince Zhou sat down.

Fu Rou thought that he was being strange. "It is my fault for wandering around in the middle of the night. If Your Highness thinks that I should be punished, you can simply hand me over to the Imperial Guards. If you want to threaten me, I am sorry but I will not accept it."

This was not part of her duties. Even if this person had a much higher status, she did not want to degrade herself.

Prince Zhou looked at Fu Rou, who was still standing outside. "Everyone in the palace says that you treat things seriously and are careful in everything you do. It seems like they were speaking the truth. Head Seamstress Fu, how many people are there in the Seamstress Department?"

Fu Rou was baffled. “Your Highness, why do you want to know this?”

Prince Zhou replied, “The internal courtyard of the Royal Palace is the place with the most schemes and tricks in the world. There was a huge case in the previous dynasty. A group of palace maids were unhappy with Consort Lu for killing one of their people and planned to poison her. However, one of the palace maids was caught by the Imperial Guards as she was headed to meet them in the night. She was interrogated and eventually spilled the truth. All the palace maids were then executed. Head Seamstress Fu was behaving strangely in the middle of the night. Who knows if you were plotting something along with the Seamstress Department? Should the Imperial Guards lock up all the heads, ladies and palace maids to interrogate them?” *It was a pity not everyone had a personality like hers.*

“I will be responsible for my own actions...” Fu Rou became anxious.

“This is the Royal Palace. It is a taboo to form a group and any actions will implicate others. It is not possible for one person to take responsibility.” *Gullible! If he wanted to frame her, she would have to drink from a teapot!* “So do you want to come over or do you want to leave?”

Fu Rou looked at Prince Zhou for a while before slowly making her way over. She helped him to prepare his ink.

Prince Zhou lifted his brush in preparation to paint. From the corners of his eyes, he caught sight of a red angry face. The corners of his lips turned up in a smile; he was feeling happy.

Very soon, the entire Royal Palace was busy preparing for the Crown Prince’s wedding. The Seamstress Department worked around the clock to prepare all sorts of embroidery required for the wedding. Not only did Fu Rou have to check every single piece of item, she also had to help out with the embroidery. However, she did not think that this was tough. On one hand, it distracted her from imagining the worst for Sheng Chumu. On the other hand, she could avoid being called over by Prince Zhou to become his personal servant.

When the wedding ceremony ended smoothly, everyone in the Seamstress Department breathed a sigh of relief. However, the following day after the wedding, Fu Rou returned to the Seamstress Department first thing in the morning.

Lady Xue, who had just been promoted, saw that Fu Rou was not looking great and urged her to go and rest. However, Fu Rou noted issues on the pillowcase that they were making for Princess Xinnan and corrected them.

All of a sudden, everyone greeted, “Prince Zhou.” Fu Rou felt as if the sky had just darkened. She sighed silently as she turned around and greeted the huge figure standing by the door.

“What is that?” Prince Zhou was not interested in the pillow case but was interested in finding things for Fu Rou to do. “Sew one for me as well.”

“I still have various tasks that have been assigned to me.” When faced with ‘bullying’, she did not back down.

“When are you going to be done with the pouch that I asked you to make?” He suddenly recalled.

“I...” She hadn't even started and had completely forgotten about it. She wanted to brush it off. “...will try to finish it quickly.”

“I want the pillowcase at the beginning of next month and the pouch in three days. Come to Lingxiao Palace in the afternoon.” Since she was so busy, he would help her arrange it.

“If you have anything else for me, you can say it here.” She did not want to go back to preparing ink.

“You can refuse to come but you need to consider carefully what the consequences are. I will leave now.”

Prince Zhou's gaze swept across the entire Seamstress Department. Seeing how Fu Rou's expression changed, he achieved his goal. He then walked away calmly.

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With Prince Zhou's appearance, Fu Rou did not dare to go and rest as she continued working in the Seamstress Department. The sun was about to set and Fu Rou knew that she could not put it off any longer as she headed to Lingxiao Palace. She could not help but admit that no matter how many times he used this to threaten her, she would have no choice but to comply. She could not afford the consequence of disobeying. Even if she could accept the punishment, there were so many innocent people in the Seamstress Department.

Endure! Endure! Endure! Fu Rou's head was about to explode as she remained determined. As she rounded the corner, her vision suddenly flashed black. Her body tilted to the side and she knocked into the person in front of her.

"Who are you? How dare you knock into the Crown Princess?"

Fu Rou looked up. It was really Sun Lingshu. Dressed in the outfit of the Crown Princess, she had a completely different aura from when she was a young girl worrying over a dance costume.

Fu Rou rushed to greet her. "Your Highness, please forgive me. It was unintentional."

Sun Lingshu smiled as she helped Fu Rou to stand. "Head Seamstress Fu, you don't have to be too courteous." As she saw Fu Rou's pale face, she asked out of concern, "You don't look very well. Are you

feeling alright?”

Fu Rou shook her head. “I am just short of sleep.”

“How have you been?” Although Sun Lingshu carried herself with a noble aura, she had been feeling uneasy, having just moved into the palace recently.

Fu Rou glanced at Sun Lingshu and could sense her feelings. “It is neither good nor bad. I have just been doing tasks to the best of my abilities. When I finally get permission to leave the palace, I will reunite with my family.”

“You wish to leave this place whereas I wish to make this place my home.” Sun Lingshu sighed softly, “You have it much easier.” When she was still single, she admired the Empress for having the world under her control. She had the power to control the six offices. However, after marrying the Crown Prince, she realised that there were so many people above her and this was not even taking into account people from the Grand Emperor’s side.

“Your Highness, do not worry. It was heaven’s blessing for you to be chosen. From now on, happiness will follow.” Fu Rou knew where to draw the line. In this kind of situation, she could only say a few good words.

“I am thankful to the heavens and I am also thankful to you for helping me back then.” Sun Lingshu patted Fu Rou’s hand. “When I get the chance, I promise to repay you.”

Fu Rou bowed as Sun Lingshu left. She then turned around and headed toward Lingxiao Palace. She breathed in deeply. *Repay. That’s right. She would just take it as repaying Prince Zhou. As a person, she must know how to repay other people’s kindness.*

Yet, when Prince Zhou told that he wanted to paint a woman and asked her to pose as a sick beauty, her intention to repay Prince Zhou immediately disappeared.

“A palace lady’s main duty is to serve the Royal Family. I am from the Royal Family and you are a palace lady. Attending to me is your

duty.” Prince Zhou pointed to a couch under the window. “Go over there and lie down. Do a pose of a sick beauty.”

Fu Rou felt dizzy and had no energy to argue.

She walked to the couch and lay down. She closed her eyes. *If she could not see him, she could pretend he did not exist.*

Prince Zhou wanted to ask Fu Rou to open her eyes but saw her delicate and frail disposition. Her complexion was white like snow while her lips were a shocking red. All of a sudden, he got an inspiration and started painting.

As he was about to finish his painting, Prince Zhou looked up only to see that Fu Rou had laid down completely. Her hands lay limply off the couch and her head tilted downward.

“Don’t lie down. You are supposed to depict a sick beauty and should look frail and beautiful. The position you were in just now was good. Now, it is too much and—” Prince Zhou suddenly realised that something was off. He threw down his brush and took big steps towards Fu Rou. He shook her. “Head Seamstress Fu?”

Fu Rou did not move. She had fainted. Prince Zhou’s expression changed as he carried Fu Rou and dashed out of his residence.

Fu Rou sighed out loud and got up slowly. She felt like she had just woken from a very comfortable sleep. She was shocked out of her wits when she saw Prince Zhou standing in front of her. Sitting up, she retreated backward slowly. Prince Zhou saw how shocked she was and decided to tease her. He got on the bed and closed the distance between them. He moved in until she had nowhere else to go. When Fu Rou started panicking, Prince Zhou pulled backward.

“I...” Fu Rou silently called for help as she surveyed her surroundings. Beautiful decorations and exquisite furnishings filled the room. It was apparent that she was in Prince Zhou’s residence. “Why am I here?”

“You were supposed to act like you were sick, not actually be sick.”

Prince Zhou was now beside a couch, but his eyes remained fixed on her. Fu Rou noticed the bowl of medicine he was carrying. Prince Zhou informed her, "The Imperial Physician said that you need more rest because you have overworked yourself. He prescribed you this medicine."

Fu Rou was still half conscious as she reached for the medicine. "Thank you, Your Highness."

However, Prince Zhou did not give the bowl of medicine to her. Instead, he blew gently on the hot bowl of medicine and served a spoon to her, "Open your mouth."

Fu Rou instantly became alert and tried to get off the bed. Yet, with his bigger stature, Prince Zhou easily stopped her with his arm.

"Be good. Don't think of running away when I am feeding you." *It was fun to play with this girl.*

"A man and a woman should not be so close to each other. Your Highness, you are becoming increasingly excessive. Please pardon me for not complying." *What nonsense!*

"Lie down." Prince Zhou continued to laugh, his mood hardly affected.

"You...if you are so straightforward, I will have to call for someone." Fu Rou blushed.

Prince Zhou remained calm. "You can shout and let everyone know. Then you have to choose between remaining single forever or marrying me and becoming my concubine." Prince Zhou was looking forward to marrying her.

Fu Rou was startled as her mind ran. She knew that things might really turn out to be what he just said. She would rather die than let him have his way!

"If others see a female official on my bed, you will never be able to regain your innocence. On the other hand, I will escape just fine. After a brief reprimanding by my Imperial Father, I can take you in as my concubine. If you want to take the hard way and shout away,

you can go ahead..." Prince Zhou intentionally dragged the end of his sentence.

Fu Rou was silent.

"Not going to shout?" *Aiya, what a pity!* "Lie down obediently and keep your reputation in mind. I have even sent the maids outside and am personally here to serve you. What else are you unhappy about?"

Fu Rou calmed down. "Didn't the Imperial Physician come to see me? The rumors would still spread."

"I have a few people that I trust among the Imperial Physicians. They will not spread any rumors." Prince Zhou lifted the spoon. "Open your mouth."

"I will drink the medicine by myself." Fu Rou stubbornly declined.

This made Prince Zhou more interested and he purposely made a serious face. "Head Seamstress Fu, do you know that men do not like being provoked by females?"

Fu Rou could not help retort, "Females also do not like to being fed medicine by men."

"If you talk back to me one more time, I will take you right now." Prince Zhou was filled with desire. "I stick to my words. Do you want to challenge my patience?" *Come, try me. I will see if you dare!*

Fu Rou unwillingly opened her mouth. Regardless of what she wanted, she had to give in to Prince Zhou in order for him to back off. Prince Zhou fed Fu Rou the medicine. He laughed inwardly when he observed her surprise reaction from the bitterness of the medicine. He continued to feed her and very soon she finished it.

As Prince Zhou scooped the last remaining medicine for Fu Rou, he suddenly asked, "What is the name of the man you like?"

Fu Rou desperately wanted this whole situation to end and replied, "His name is..." She suddenly came to her senses. "Why are you asking me this?"

Prince Zhou remained expressionless, but many thoughts formed in his mind. "You are so afraid of being caught on my bed, so you are obviously unwilling to become my woman. That means that you must have another person in your heart. What is his name? Is he working in the palace?"

Fu Rou's eyebrows knitted together. "Why must I tell you this?"

"You did not correct me. That means he really is working in the palace."

Fu Rou had not imagined that Prince Zhou would be so sharp and was slightly taken aback.

"I wasn't too sure initially, but your expression now has allowed me to confirm my suspicions. If he is working in the palace and he can come into contact with the Head Seamstress, is he a guard? Or an official in court? He can't possibly be a eunuch, right?" Prince Zhou's curiosity was piqued.

Fu Rou had her guard up this time and she remained silent.

"Do you think you can hide everything by remaining silent?" Prince Zhou chuckled. "I heard that you were from the Han Mansion before you entered the palace. That man must be related to the Han Mansion."

Fu Rou shut her eyes.

"Closing your eyes? I must have guessed right?" *This woman does not hide her feelings, it is easy to read her.*

Opening her eyes, Fu Rou stared bravely at Prince Zhou. "I don't care whether you make the correct guess or not. You are right, I already have someone in my heart. In this lifetime, I will only have him in my heart."

She said it, so please let her off!

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In the battle between Great Tang and Sheng Empire, life ended in the most violent ways. It did not matter who the enemy was, living was a victory.

Sheng Chumu was the bravest and most outstanding because he was fearful of death. Death would mean that he and Fu Rou would be forever apart. As such, he rejected Lu Qi's offer of a drink and the Lu family's invitation for a meal. This all made sense. He treasured his life dearly. It was all for his woman who was waiting in Chang'an for his return.

Sheng Chumu's eyes were bloodshot but he forgot that the battlefield was littered with flying arrows. His horse was shot by one and it lost its footing, throwing him down onto the floor. A few enemy troops rushed towards him with murderous intent and it seemed that it would be his end.

In the blink of an eye, a black shadow flashed past him. The man dealt decisive blows and quickly finished off the enemy troops.

"Thank you." Sheng Chumu observed that the man was wearing Great Tang armor. The man turned around with his blood stained face. Gritting his teeth, he yelled, "Sheng Chumu!"

Sheng Chumu lit up and exclaimed in surprise, "Fu Tao!"

To his surprise, Fu Tao jumped onto Sheng Chumu and punched him. "Once we finish this battle, I will settle it with you!" With that, Fu Tao turned and concentrated on the battle again.

Sheng Chumu came to a realization. Fu Tao was still unaware of what happened in the Fu family and did not know that he had made up with Fu Rou. Sheng Chumu smirked. Without hesitation, he picked up his sword again and rushed toward Fu Tao. The two guarded each other's back for the rest of the battle.

The pair seemed to be invincible as they continued fighting against the enemy troops. Corpses lay all around them and they were both drenched in blood. It was only then that the two of them leaned back to back against each other as they struggled to catch their breaths.

Fu Tao pushed Sheng Chumu weakly with the top of his elbow. "You are an idiot who bullies my Second Sister."

Exhausted as well, Sheng Chumu stopped Fu Tao. "Stop it, I have resolved things with your sister." Sheng Chumu retrieved the fragrance pouch he kept with him. "Look."

Fu Tao wearily turned around to face Sheng Chumu. He surveyed the fragrance pouch and commented, "This is my sister's work."

Sheng Chumu laughed lightly and the two supported each other to walk towards a more peaceful area.

"Why are you here?" Sheng Chumu asked.

"I constantly received transfer requests in the army. In the end, I was assigned to the same team as you. I performed well and was promoted to be Assistant Lieutenant Rong, a ninth-grade soldier." Fu Tao wearily took out a handkerchief and opened it, revealing a gold ring inside. "I used my first salary from the army to buy this. My mother has a gold ring that was passed down to her from my grandmother. She treasures it a lot and when I was young, I was even reprimanded by her for playing with it. Now, I have the ability to buy a gold ring for her. Once this battle is over, I will write back to my family and tell my mother that I have become a Ninth-Grade Assistant Lieutenant. I will send this ring back to the house. Hehe,

wouldn't she be so beautiful wearing it? I can imagine her wearing it every day and night, boasting to First Madam and Second Madam."

A heavy feeling filled Sheng Chumu's heart and he sighed, placing a consoling hand on Fu Tao's shoulder. "Fu Tao, a big fire occurred in the Fu Residence. Your mother..." With that, he shook his head solemnly.

Fu Tao blankly stared at Sheng Chumu. The handkerchief and gold ring in his hand fell towards the ground, carrying with it the sorrow of the battlefield.

On this day, it was the deadline for Fu Rou to give the pouch to Prince Zhou. She had no choice but to stand before Lingxiao Palace once again. After staring at her feet for a long while, she finally headed in. She placed a pouch on the shelf and lowered her eyes, careful not to look at Prince Zhou.

Prince Zhou played with the pouch and asked, "Did you make this pouch by yourself?"

Fu Rou answered, "I do not dare to disobey Your Highness' orders."

Prince Zhou stared at the strange beast sewn on the pouch. "This embroidery here is of a Guardian Lion...are you trying to mock me?"

Fu Rou lifted her gaze, her eyes bright and clear. "I definitely do not have any intentions of mocking you but I felt that this Guardian Lion was befitting for you. Despite being a royalty, you are different from the rest of the dragon sons. Although the Guardian Lion looks like a dog, it is actually a dragon. Furthermore, like Your Highness, this Guardian Lion is the third son of the dragon. The Guardian Lion symbolises prosperity, beauty and it is majestic. I can personally vouch for these qualities in Your Highness."

"Heh, you are very smooth with your words. The Guardian Lion's majestic features are meant to scare away demon beasts. I will target whichever demon comes my way too." Prince Zhou did not know that he was very smooth with his words too.

"I have given you the embroidery, I will take my leave now." *He is a demon beast. Should she not avoid him?*

"Stop." Every time she wanted to leave, he prevented her from doing so.

"Prince Zhou, what other..."

"...orders do I have for you. I knew you would say this. How are you feeling now?"

Fu Rou was mildly taken aback as she felt that he was asking her sincerely. "I do not dare to trouble you to worry about me. I am much better now." It didn't matter if he was sincere or he was joking. She did not care.

"It seems that it was effective for me to personally feed you your medicine." Prince Zhou teased her, a slight warmth in his voice. Fu Rou blushed again at his comment.

"Alright, since you can't seem to take jokes. I won't tease you any further." Prince Zhou knew when to stop. "Actually I felt bad for causing you to faint the previous time and I wanted to make up for it. If you have anything you want, feel free to request it from me."

"I only have one request from Your Highness, please do not ask me to come over for no reason anymore." Fu Rou silently prayed that this would be her last time coming to Lingxiao Palace.

"I cannot promise you that. I am too bored in the palace. Without your company, my mood will be bad."

He wanted to see her everyday and talk to her. *When he listens to her, he momentarily forgets where he is and feels a lot happier.*

"Since that is the case, I don't have anything else I want to request from you."

"Really? This chance is hard to come by. It is a pity if you do not cherish it." His tone seemed to want to lure her in.

Fu Rou's eyes widened slightly. This was not her first time dealing

with Prince Zhou. Everything that he gave always came with a price. The less she associated with him, the better.

“What a pity. I thought that you would miss your family having been in the palace for a while. I wanted to take you out for a day. Since you don’t want to be involved with me, then forget it.” He looked at her, confident of himself.

Fu Rou’s eyes lit up. She knew that she should not act so obviously but she could not hide the longing for her family. Ever since she entered the Han Mansion and the Royal Palace, she only managed to reunite with her family for one night and had not been home ever since.

“Then I will have to trouble Your Highness.” She struggled internally and eventually gave in.

“Okay.” Prince Zhou answered quickly and did not tease her anymore. After all, he wanted her to feel grateful to him.

With Prince Zhou’s arrangements, Fu Rou disguised as his internal attendant to leave the palace. Her parents were doing well despite not enjoying as wealthy a lifestyle as before. They were getting along well with her second uncle and their family. Fu Rou could rest assured once she saw her family. As soon as she came out, she thanked Prince Zhou but was also hesitant.

Prince Zhou achieved his goal and was delighted. He felt generous as he asked, “Is there anything else you want?”

“When I was at the Han Mansion previously, Consort Han was very kind to me. I would like to pay her a visit.” *That was the only place for her to get information about Sheng Chumu.*

“Consort Han?” Prince Zhou was not suspicious as he wanted to portray himself as a good person. “Sure.”

When the pair arrived at the Han Mansion, Prince Han recognised Fu Rou but did not say more. After serving a cup of tea to Prince Zhou, Consort Han pulled Fu Rou into her room.

“Why are you with Prince Zhou?” Consort Han was concerned. “It

won't be good if people found out you snuck out of the palace."

"Prince Zhou willingly brought me out, I don't think we will be discovered." Fu Rou found it hard to hide her concern. "Your Highness, is there news about Chumu?"

"Despite being away for so long, we only received a single letter from him. He hastily wrote a few brief sentences and didn't say anything else." Consort Han was also hesitant. "I am afraid that he is having a hard time now."

"It is all my fault. Because of me, Chumu fought against Lu Qi. Now that he is Lu Yunji's assistant general, Lu Yunji must be bullying him."

"That is not true." Consort Han rebutted, "Even if the battle had not occurred, the Lu family is not on good terms with the Sheng family. I am just worried for Chumu since this is his first time in the battlefield."

"The Duke of Lu holds a high position in court. Did he not ask anyone to take care of Chumu?"

When it came to Sheng Chumu, Fu Rou was willing to try anything.

Consort Han told her that their family had already tried. However, Lu Yunji was extreme and transferred all of her father's friends to other battalions. He even came up with excuses to send away the guards that the Duke Lu sent to Sheng Chumu. Chumu could only rely on himself now.

Fu Rou had expected things to be difficult but did not expect it to be so difficult.

Fu Rou's eyes reflected her concern and Consort Han continued to console her. "You don't have to worry too much. My brother is smart and he can take care of himself. Although he did not mention you in his letter, I know it is because he doesn't want us to tell you anything and make you worry. All you have to do is take good care of yourself in the palace; that would be his greatest wish."

Fu Rou broke into a smile and nodded. Fu Rou left Consort Han and

was heading to the main hall when she heard someone call, “Sister-in-law”. Sheng Chuling jumped out in front of Fu Rou. Fu Rou was startled.

“Sister-in-law, come with me.” Sheng Chuling pulled Fu Rou to the side. Acting secretive, he fished out a peace knot. “Sister-in-law, you are a palace lady and can walk around freely. Could you help me give this to Princess Xinnan?”

Court Lady

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A few days ago, Sheng Chuling and Princess Xinnan caused a commotion at Qinglou Winehouse. The Empress found out about it and wanted to punish Sheng Chuling. However, Princess Xinnan took responsibility and was caned.

Fu Rou heard that Princess Xinnan went to Qinglou Winehouse and was disguised as a guy. Sheng Chuling happened to be there at that time and stood up to protect Xinnan. Eventually, he fought with others. By the time she heard about this issue, the situation had already been resolved and she did not have a chance to ask what happened. Now, she was interested.

“This peace knot is so ugly, I bet you made this yourself. What is going on between you and the Princess?” *The fact that the both of them were in the same place could not have been a coincidence.*

“Sister-in-law, you are such a smart person and can definitely guess what is going on. Don’t make fun of me.” Sheng Chuling was awkward.

“Oh, hearing you say that made me think of another thing. Recently, there have been a few cases of kites flying into the palace after getting cut off from their string. There were words written on the kites and Princess Xinnan said that the kites were all hers. Anyone who picked up a kite has to send it to her palace. She would even

reward them. Are you the cause of this?" *There was definitely something going on between these two.*

"Really? She really said that all the kites belong to her?" Sheng Chuling was overjoyed. "Then she definitely must have seen the..."

Sheng Chuling tugged on Fu Rou's sleeve. "Sister-in-law. Please help me. You have to help me give this peace knot to her."

Fu Rou laughed, "How old are you? You are still trying to act cute. Aren't you embarrassed?"

Sheng Chuling was unfazed. His skin was too thick. "Elder Brother said that he would definitely marry you. Since you are my future sister-in-law, there is a saying that an elder sister-in-law's is like another mother. Therefore, you are like a mother to me—"

Fu Rou could not bear to listen to him any longer as she grabbed the peace knot and walked away. The three Sheng brothers all like to depend on others. They all spoke too well and no one could win against them. She had no idea that someone had already leaked out that Prince Zhou snuck her out of the palace.

Sun Lingshu carried a bowl of ginseng soup as she entered the Crown Prince's study. Sun Lingshu sat by the side quietly until the Crown Prince was done giving his instructions before serving the ginseng soup to him.

When she first entered the palace, she did not feel anxious and believed that she would take things as they come. Other than their wedding night, the Crown Prince had never once been to her palace. She did not know what to do and did not know whether it was a problem with her or the Crown Prince was simply too busy. The Crown Prince finally looked up and smiled at Sun Lingshu. "I am sorry for making you wait, Crown Princess. It smells amazing."

Sun Lingshu told herself that the Crown Prince must be too busy. He smiled warmly towards her and must like her.

She smiled back warmly. "Drink it while it is hot."

Yet, just as the Crown Prince was about to drink the soup, his attendant handed him a slip of paper.

When the Crown Prince looked through it, he snorted. "Just because my Imperial Father dotes on Third Brother, he does whatever he wants. He actually brought a palace lady out of the palace. Let's see what he has to say for himself when I report this to my Imperial Father tomorrow."

Sun Linghus heard this and thought to herself. *Isn't that Fu Rou?*

She thought about how she still owed Fu Rou and said, "Your Highness, pardon me for asking but will that be too harsh? Prince Zhou has the Emperor's favor and although it is not appropriate, it is also not a crime. When the Emperor hears about this, he will reprimand Prince Zhou, but will also start to think that you are narrow-minded and want to drive a wedge between him and your brothers. You will win a little but stand to lose a lot. Moreover, Head Seamstress Fu caught the Empress' eye and was brought into the palace. If she gets into trouble, Mother will lose face and the Han Mansion will also be implicated. We will stand to lose a lot."

The Crown Prince nodded. "Not bad, I will listen to you and drop this matter." As he said this, he brought the spoon to Sun Lingshu's mouth. "Crown Princess, you are bright and it is my good fortune to have you by my side."

Sun Lingshu giggled shyly and drank the soup. "It is my fortune to be able to accompany you, Your Highness. The sky is turning dark, we should rest early."

The Crown Prince lowered the spoon. "I still have some things to settle before I can head to bed. You can go first. If you stay here, I will be distracted and may not be able to finish my work before the sun rises."

Sun Lingshu was disappointed. It was always this lukewarm attitude that made her feel helpless.

Sun Lingwei noticed that her sister's mood was not great after she had returned from the Crown Prince's place. Without saying a second word, she brought her sister out into the Imperial Garden to play hide-and-seek. Sun Lingshu started to feel happier once again when someone coughed --

“Who is making such a big commotion?”

Sun Lingshu turned around and immediately hid her smile.

Official Situ walked up to Sun Lingshu. Her expression did not change as she greeted, “Your Highness is the official wife of the future leader of this country. You are the owner of the Eastern Palace. Your words and actions have to abide strictly by the rules. You should not laugh loudly or conduct yourself so ungracefully. You are ruining the reputation of the Eastern Palace.”

“You are just a servant. How dare you speak to my sister in such an insolent manner!” In Sun Lingwei's eyes, her sister was perfect. She even managed to become the Crown Princess and will be the future Empress. She married into the Royal Family so gloriously and everyone should respect her.

Sun Lingshu shook her head at her sister as she endured and kept her voice calm. “Thank you for the reminder. I will be more careful in the future.”

Official Situ lowered her eyes. “It is good that you know. Her Majesty, the Empress, has instructed me to manage the Office of Rites and I am in-charge of the behaviour and mannerism of everyone in the palace. If Your Highness has any questions regarding the rules, I am very willing to go through it with you.”

“You!” Sun Lingwei was bursting with anger. *How could Official Situ be so demanding?*

Sun Lingshu immediately spoke, “There is no need for that. I have already learned the palace rules before I entered.”

Official Situ's expression did not change. “Since Your Highness does not need me to teach you, I will take my leave.”

Sun Lingwei waited until Official Situ was a distance away before stomping her foot. “Elder Sister, why did you hold back?”

“You don’t understand.” However, Sun Lingshu had to understand.

Her biggest takeaway after marrying into the palace was that a woman’s most precious years were the years just before she got married. As soon as they were married, it was like they entered an entirely different universe. She faced a husband that she was not familiar with and a stranger for a mother-in-law. Even though she had half the authority in the house, everyone only paid attention to seniority. Official Situ has served the Empress and the Crown Prince before. Although Official Situ was ultimately still just a palace lady, she was highly experienced and she could not offend her as a newcomer.

Sun Lingwei did not know of her sister’s troubles and was extremely stubborn. “When you become the Empress in the future, the first thing you should do is to get rid of that old hag and teach these palace ladies how to differentiate between authority.”

Sun Lingshu merely laughed. It was not easy to deal with palace ladies. Similar to how her Imperial Mother trusted Official Situ and gave her the authority over an entire office, she also needed to have a palace lady loyal to her. Then when she needed to do things, it would be much easier. A candidate appeared in her mind -- Fu Rou.

Fu Rou’s mood was low as she left the Eastern Palace.

Sun Lingshu requested for her to make another eye-catching dance costume. Fu Rou knew that it was to please the Crown Prince but she felt that this trick might not be useful anymore. Furthermore, Sun Lingshu was already the master of the Eastern Palace. It was not particularly outstanding to use dance costumes and dancers to attract the Crown Prince. She had voiced out her opinion that this might not work but Sun Lingshu had made up her mind and even criticised her for having a bad attitude.

She spoke the truth yet was misunderstood by someone she had

helped before. She sighed. No wonder everyone in the palace acted carefully. It was hard to guess what other people's true intentions are. The Sun Lingshu from the Han Mansion was so innocent and only prepared a simple dance costume. However, now that Sun Lingshu was the Crown Princess, she had become anxious, cold and arrogant.

"Aiya!" Fu Rou heard someone shout from behind the fake stone mountain. She rushed over only to see a lady sitting dejectedly on the floor, completely drenched. A suspicious looking attendant disappeared behind the fake mountain.

The girl on the ground was Lu Yingying.

Fu Rou knew that despite losing, Lu Yingying often entered the palace to chat with Empress Zhangsun. The Empress adored her and it was rumoured that she was considering making Lu Yingying the Crown Prince's concubine. This would increase Lu Yingying's status to one that was not far off from Sun Lingshu. This place was near to the Eastern Palace and the attendant had been wearing the uniform from the Eastern Palace. Someone might have done this out of spite.

Fu Rou stepped up to help Lu Yingying as an unknown feeling washed over her. She had once helped Sun Lingshu defeat Lu Yingying. Yet, today, she was helping Lu Yingying and ruining Sun Lingshu's plans. She was getting entangled with them.

"I have seen you before." Lu Yingying recognised Fu Rou and her eyes glimmered. "On the day that I entered Chang'an, I met you once in front of the city gates. The curtains of your carriage were open. Nice to meet you. I am Lu Yingying."

Fu Rou never thought that there would be such a coincidence. She imagined that Lu Yingying would be a pampered and scheming person. She did not expect her to be so generous and have such kind eyes.

"I am Fu Rou." Although the Lu father-son pair were despicable, Fu Rou still needed some time to examine if their daughter was as evil. Hence, Fu Rou was generous. "Do you want to go to my room to change your clothes?"

“Fu Rou?” Lu Yingying froze. “You are the reason why my brother fought with Sheng Chumu in front of the Imperial family. Why would you help me?”

“The road is slightly bumpy, give me your hand.” Moreover, she might have misjudged her. “It is just a set of normal clothes, there is no need to consider it a favour. You can just disregard today.” She wanted to make it such that they did not owe each other anything.

Lu Yingying saw that Fu Rou had no intentions of using her to raise her status nor was she trying to get close. She changed her clothes, thanked Fu Rou and left. Fu Rou appreciated that Lu Yingying was a straightforward person.

Court Lady

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After a few days, Fu Rou submitted the dance outfit that Sun Lingshu requested. She tried her best to make it as she was ordered, keeping it elegant while adding jewels wherever possible. Unexpectedly, Sun Lingshu was not appreciative of the dance outfit that Fu Rou put in effort to make. She did not even bother to try it on and threw it onto the table, showing a dark face.

“I heard that your embroidery skills have been acknowledged by both Imperial Mother and Concubine Yan. But why is it so poor when it comes to me? Are your abilities limited or could my Eastern Palace not be worthy of your jewels?” She had thought that Fu Rou had good foresight and that’s why she made that raining flower dress that day.

“I do not dare.” Fu Rou did not expect Sun Lingshu to be so demanding. “I believe that having too much is as good as not having anything. As the Crown Princess, you can wear as luscious a dress as you want but it would not be fitting of your personality.”

“Enough!” Sun Lingshu interrupted impatiently, “Before I got married, I was restricted by my family to not seek lavishness. But now that I am the Crown Princess, what I eat and wear has to match my status. If not, people will think that I am petty. Head Seamstress Fu, you entered the palace before me and should know this.”

Fu Rou opened her mouth before closing it.

“That’s enough. Bring it back to amend it.” Sun Lingshu waved dismissively and spoke as if she was tired. “Head Seamstress Fu, don’t just treat Imperial Mother and Concubine Yan well, you should look further ahead. Moreover, we have a past together. As long as you are sincere, from now on, you can rise along with me.”

Fu Rou felt a chill in her heart. *Was this what it meant when people say the palace devours people’s souls? The Sun family’s daughter had already been swallowed. The Crown Princess in front of her is no longer the girl she knew before.*

“I will obey your order.”

She did not persist, there was no need to. They were going on separate ways.

Fu Rou held onto the dress as she walked through the Imperial Garden. From afar, she caught sight of Prince Zhou and wanted to hide. However, he had already seen her.

“I haven’t seen you recently and thought that you had fallen sick again. I was just intending to go and find you.” She really knew how to hide. It was as if she grew a thousand eyes and he could not find her wherever he went.

“I have been busy.” She was telling the truth. She had gone to the Eastern Palace twice and still had to amend the skirt.

“Are you sure you weren’t just avoiding me?” Prince Zhou took a step closer to her. His face was haughty, yet his eyes displayed a hint of eagerness.

“No.” She did not see the eagerness in his eyes and was focused on looking back to see where she could find an escape route.

“That’s good. If not, I will be upset. I risked getting reprimanded by my Imperial Father just to let you see your family. In the end, not only did you not thank me, you even avoided me.”

Fu Rou did not realise that Prince Zhou used ‘me’ to refer to himself.

“Your Highness must be kidding.”

Prince Zhou smiled. “What are you holding?” Without waiting for Fu Rou to answer, he grabbed it and opened it up to see.

“It is beautiful. I didn’t expect you to know how to embroider and dance as well. When will you let me watch you dance? You must be mesmerising.”

“I don’t know how to dance. This dance outfit was made for the Crown Princess. However, Her Highness is not satisfied so I am bringing it back to add more pearls and gems.” Unknowingly, she expressed her dissatisfaction.

Prince Zhou immediately sensed it. “It seems like you have different thoughts.”

“When making clothes, what we consider most is the suitability. It does not mean that the more you put on a dress, the better it becomes. But since this was the Crown Princess request, I can only do my best. I have to at least add a few pearls and gems.” Fu Rou spoke the truth.

“Add a few?” Prince Zhou wanted to laugh. “Head Seamstress Fu, you are going against the Crown Princess. The Crown Princess has just entered the palace and this is the time where she should establish herself. All she wants is a luxurious dress, yet the Seamstress Department is trying to stop her. Those who know you will understand that you just want to do your best and not ruin a dress by adding too much material. However, those that do not know will think that the Seamstress Department, which is just a small department, does not respect the Crown Princess.”

“Why do you all always complicate things?” Fu Rou really could not understand. “All there is to a dance outfit is whether it is suitable or not.”

“In the Royal Palace, everything is related. Anything you do will have resounding impacts. Nothing is as simple as it seems.” It was just like him at the moment. Although it looked like he was looking at a dance outfit, he was thinking of other things.

Fu Rou sighed. She had wanted to pretend to understand in front of the Crown Princess and act dumb, only intending to change a small part. Perhaps she could satisfy both sides. Thankfully Prince Zhou pointed this out. It seemed she had been too ignorant.

“It is a small matter whether the dress still looks nice after I add more gems on it. The Seamstress Department cannot go against Her Highness instructions and belittle her. I shall do whatever she says.”

“You learn fast.” A brilliant smile appeared on Prince Zhou’s face.

The next day, Fu Rou handed over the altered dress to Sun Lingshu.

Sun Lingshu looked at the dress. Silver and pearls were all over the dress and every thread had a gem attached to it. The entire dress was dazzling. This was a dress that was worthy of her status. She was delighted and immediately wore it. Putting on an outerwear, she ran to the Crown Prince’s study room, intending to surprise him.

However, as Sun Lingshu entered the study room, she saw that the Crown Prince was frowning, looking extremely troubled.

Earlier, Prince Zhou had presented the Emperor with a piece < <Admonishing Extravagance> >. The Emperor was full of praises for him and rewarded Prince Zhou with a precious horse that was given as a tribute by Great Shi. The Emperor also instructed the Crown Prince to make a copy of it and read it often. Firstly, Prince Zhou had garnered the Emperor’s favour and this made the Crown Prince unhappy. Secondly, he had hinted to his father that he liked the precious horse that had been given by Great Shi but his father had given it to Prince Zhou. *How he could not feel suffocated?*

“Your Highness, you look upset. Is something wrong?” Sun Lingshu thought that this was her chance.

The Crown Prince forced a smile. “No, I’m just a little tired.”

Sun Lingshu threw her own palace maid, Shuangxi, a look. Shuangxi remarked. “The Crown Princess has been practicing dancing and singing. How about the Crown Princess perform a song and dance for

Your Highness to enjoy?”

Sun Lingshu took the chance to add, “Although you have a lot of things to do, you have to relax as well.”

“Okay.” The Crown Prince hesitated but recalled how fairy-like Sun Lingshu was during the Crown Princess selection and could not help but become excited. Eventually, he nodded.

Shuangxi immediately clapped and the musicians entered.

The music started and other female dancers entered, starting to dance. When they spread out, Sun Lingshu appeared in the middle. Sun Lingshu stood up and started to turn. Her dress tinkled with the sound of gems hitting each other. The numerous multi-coloured jewels sparkled and were extremely blinding.

The Crown Prince was extremely shocked as the book < < Admonishing Extravagance > > lying on his table pricked his eyes.

“Stop dancing! Get out!” He suddenly shot up and bellowed furiously. Everyone dispersed like birds. Only Sun Lingshu stood where she was. She was too shocked to move.

“Your Highness?” Sun Lingshu stammered.

The Crown Prince picked up < < Admonishing Extravagance > > and threw it at Sun Lingshu’s feet. “Look at what is written on there! The stack of petitions are so much that they form a screen, fortunately my wife’s dress don’t touch the ground. Han Wendi was a role model emperor and even his beloved wife, Empress Shen, did not wear dresses that touched the ground. Look at yourself. As a Crown Princess, not only are you not practicing prudence and being a role model for the other palace workers, you are excessively extravagant. Your dress is packed with precious pearls and jewels! Your Sun family has always prided yourselves on being moral and having good conduct. Is this what you consider good conduct?”

Sun Lingshu’s voice trembled. “Crown Prince, I only...” She only wanted to gain his pity.

“Get out!” If my father were to know about this, this < <

Admonishing Extravagance > > would seem to be directed at him. “I do not want to see your proud and hateful look!”

Sun Lingshu cried as she ran out. Who knew that she would bump into Official Situ.

As Official Situ looked at the sorry sight Sun Lingshu was in as well as the extravagant dress that she was wearing, she remarked, “Crown Princess, you are charging around violently. You do not have any bearing!”

“Official Situ, that is enough! I don’t need a female official like you to lecture me!” Sun Lingshu was feeling extremely wronged. *In other people’s eyes, why does it seem like everything she does is wrong?*

Official Situ maintained a serious expression. “I am in charge of the behaviour of everyone in the palace. If anyone behaves inappropriately, I have the right to lecture them. You are the Crown Princess, yet your hair is in a mess and you are running around sloppily. How is this appropriate? And what are you wearing? It is extravagant and vulgar and does not uphold the look of the Royal Family. Do you think you are some low class dancer that you can wear this?”

Sun Lingshu lifted her hand and slapped Official Situ across the face. She was furious. “I am still the Crown Princess. You are just a servant serving the Royal Family and you are worth as much as the dog we rear at home. How dare you insult me?”

“What great upbringing you have, Crown Princess. The official in charge of Rites in the Royal Palace, is only as worthy as your dog.” Empress Zhangsun’s voice pierced through the air.

“Imperial Mother, I...” Sun Lingshu dropped to her knees in fear. “I just...” She could not utter a word.

“I never knew that our female officials turned into dogs of the Royal Family. This is the first time I am hearing something like this and it is actually coming from your mouth, Crown Princess.” Empress Zhangsun narrowed her eyes as she instructed her attendants. “Go and find a place for the Crown Princess to kneel. Don’t let her block

anyone's way.”

Sun Lingshu looked up, pain and indignance filled her eyes. She had always believed that before marriage, her parents would dote on her. After she got married, her husband would dote on her. However, in such a short time, her entire world collapsed and she had no one to rely on. In the Royal Palace, all there is are rules. There was no sorrow. There was no one that would be concerned and ask her why she was crying in her dance outfit.

Empress Zhangsun left without caring and asked Official Situ to follow her to Lizheng Palace. She was disappointed with Sun Lingshu and thought that she had made a mistake during the selection. She should have chosen Lu Yingying, who was smart and sharp.

Court Lady

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The Crown Prince was oblivious that Sun Lingshu was being punished to kneel. He left the palace and went to look for Chen Ji to catch and grill fish. When he returned to the Eastern Palace, Duke Wei Peiji suggested a good idea to him. If he presented the book "Han Shu" written by the great Confucius scholar, he could gain more favor over Prince Zhou. The Crown Prince was in a good mood.

When Official Situ came in with a bowl of soup, she wore a rare smile on her face.

The Crown Prince looked upon Official Situ highly and he stood up respectfully to greet her. "Why have you come?"

"I have not seen you in a while and I thought I would pay you a visit. I went to visit the Empress today and she wanted to send you a bowl of bird nest soup. I used this excuse of running the errand to visit you."

Official Situ placed the bowl of bird nest on the table. She carefully scooped a spoon of bird nest soup, blew gently on it to cool it before feeding it to the Crown Prince.

"Official Situ, I am not a child anymore." The Crown Prince laughed and realised that her face was slightly swollen. He could not help but be concerned. "What happened to your face?"

"I have been slightly heaty these few days and my face is slightly swollen." Official Situ brushed it off. She reserved her main point. "I always remember your younger days. Once you drank chicken soup hurriedly and scalded your tongue. Because of that incident, I cried for a few nights. In a blink of an eye, you are already married and can take care of others."

The Crown Prince seemed to be slightly unhappy. "Official Situ, you may not know but the Crown Princess...is too immature. Ignoring how she always disturbs me when I am handling official business, she even behaves inappropriately for her status. I chose her initially because she was pure and innocent. I never would have thought that she would change once we were married."

"Your Highness, although the Crown Princess is slightly daring, she is still young after all. Moreover, she just entered the palace and there are many things that she still does not understand. If you show a little concern to her, she will slowly get used to things." Official Situ was here to help them. "Her Majesty wishes for her to help you carry on the family line. If you are too busy and neglect her, it is no wonder that she would act out."

"Oh, I see." The Crown Prince agreed as he thought about it. "I have indeed neglected her. Tonight, I will go and see her."

Official Situ nodded appreciatively, "Then I will take my leave. I still have to carry out the Empress' orders."

"Wait a minute." The Crown Prince took out a jade tray that was filled with valuable pearls. "These are Naga Pearls that I asked men to bring from the Southern Seas. Each of these pearls are large and incredibly hard to get. I had to spend a lot of effort to get these ten pearls. I wanted to personally give this to my Imperial Mother. But Prince Zhou recently wrote a book 'Admonishing Extravagance' and this has greatly troubled me. Rites Officer Situ, please give this to my Imperial Mother for me."

Official Situ was taken aback. She said, "Don't worry, Your Highness. Please leave it to me."

Official Situ carried the jade plate and walked out of the palace. Her

skirt got caught on her on a corner of a stool. She placed the jade plate of pearls aside to unhook and tidy her skirt. Suddenly, she heard two palace maids quarrelling over a kite. She could not stand it and walked over to reprimand the palace maids. She even tore apart the kite during the process. To her dismay, when she returned to the jade plate, there were only seven pearls left!

“Official Situ, what are you looking for?” Sun Lingshu and Shuangxi suddenly appeared. They looked unfriendly.

After spending a night kneeling, her knees were aching and she could not forget the person who caused her to be punished. Sun Lingshu decided that she would no longer pretend to be friendly in front of this old woman. Regardless of what she did, Official Situ would pick on her, so she might as well treat her the same.

“His Highness gave me ten pearls but three pearls have gone missing. Your Highness, did you see anyone suspicious around?” Official Situ could sense that Sun Lingshu was feeling vengeful but could not be bothered.

Sun Lingshu pretended to be shocked. “His Highness put in so much effort in order to collect those ten pearls. You haven’t even left the Eastern Palace and you already lost three of them? I think you are old and confused already!” She turned to look at Shuangxi, who was enjoying the show. “Go and inform the Crown Prince that he has handed the task over to the wrong person.”

Official Situ paled as she watched Shuangxi walk away.

Soon, the Crown Prince came out.

Official Situ knelt on the floor and apologized profusely to him as tears flowed down her cheeks uncontrollably. “Your Highness, this is all my fault. It is just that the place was empty just now and I simply went to scold two palace maids. Moreover, I made sure that no one else entered the area. How can three pearls go missing like that?”

“Stop crying. I am not going to scold you.” Although the Crown Prince was annoyed, Official Situ was old and the servant who raised him, so he could not bring himself to punish her.

Sun Lingshu sat at a corner, her face filled with pity. However, she spoke coldly, “Your Highness, you cannot blame Official Situ. She is old, her hands are no longer stable and her reaction is slow. She probably had slipped when she was walking and dropped the three pearls along the way.”

Official Situ hurriedly denied, “No no. I was very careful, I definitely did not slip ...”

Sun Lingshu cut her off in annoyance. “You claimed you were being careful and still lost three pearls. If you were not careful, wouldn’t you have lost everything?”

“Since it is lost, it is lost. Forget it, I spent so much effort to find ten pearls for Imperial Mother because I wanted her to have good blessings^[1]. Now...” The Crown Prince shook his head and sighed, “I wasted my effort.”

Sun Lingshu comforted the Crown Prince, “Take this as a lesson learnt. If you have any important things in the future, you should assign it to others.”

Official Situ bit her lip and remained silent.

At this moment, Fu Rou entered along with an internal attendant. The palace maid behind her held a tray of embroideries in her hands.

Fu Rou reported, “Your Highness, the furnishings in the palace were recently changed. I am worried that these newly made tablecloths and fabric will not match the furnishings. I want to see whether they fit properly. If there is any mismatch, may I take the items back and alter them?”

Sun Lingshu found Fu Rou’s request strange but the Crown Prince permitted Fu Rou’s request.

Fu Rou chose a few fabric designs and instructed internal attendants to shift an amphora in the room. She took a few steps back to examine the amphora.

All of a sudden, the internal attendant stared into the amphora and

exclaimed, “Hm? There seems to be something inside this amphora.” He shook the amphora and clanging sounds echoed through the room.

Official Situ hurriedly stood up and snatched the amphora from the internal attendant. Turning the amphora over, three Naga Pearls rolled out.

“Naga Pearls!” Official Situ exclaimed in surprise, “We found it! Your Highness, I did not lose them. Someone is purposely framing me!”

Sun Lingshu’s eyes shone brightly. “Yes, who could be framing Official Situ? Is there anyone in the Eastern Palace that has not been scolded by Official Situ before?”

“That is enough.” The Crown Prince sighed deeply, his gaze shifted to Sun Lingshu but he did not want to pursue the matter further. “It is good that we found it. I am tired, I don’t want to waste time on pursuing this matter.”

The Crown Prince left. Official Situ carried the jade plate and left hurriedly, even forgetting to bow towards Sun Lingshu.

Sun Lingshu glared at Fu Rou who was casually tidying up the fabric and furnishings. She questioned in a cold tone, “She made things difficult for me and you. Why did you help her?”

Sun Lingshu had heard that Official Situ had single handedly made the decision to reject Fu Rou during her Internal Entry Examination with the excuse of improper ceremonial behaviors.

Fu Rou turned towards Sun Lingshu and replied, “Although it is hard to get along with Official Situ, we should not scheme against her.”

Coincidentally, in the short time that it took Official Situ to scold the two palace maids, she had witnessed Sun Lingshu instructing Shuangxi to take three of the Naga Pearls and drop them into the amphora. Hence, Fu Rou rushed back to the Seamstress Department to get some embroidery to help Official Situ out.

“Even if it is for me?” Sun Lingshu selfishly thought that Fu Rou could be her trusted aide.

“I won’t help with this kind of thing.”

Fu Rou curtsied before turning to leave. At this very moment, she knew that she and Sun Lingshu were on completely different paths.

Just before she reached the Seamstress Department, Fu Rou caught sight of Official Situ. She walked up to Official Situ and greeted her politely.

“I thought that you didn’t like me. Why would you help me?” Official Situ immediately rushed over after delivering the pearls.

Fu Rou spoke calmly, “Once I have seen it, I cannot pretend that I didn’t. That’s all.”

Official Situ fell silent. “Head Seamstress Fu, don’t you begrudge me for not passing you in the Internal Entry Examination?”

“I wouldn’t dare. However, if I may be so bold to ask, my etiquette may not be perfect but I don’t believe that it was bad enough to fail. Official Situ, I do wonder if you are making things difficult for me.”

Official Situ nodded. “That’s right. I did make things difficult for you during the Internal Entry Examination.”

Fu Rou was curious. “Why?”

Official Situ remained calm. “Someone instructed me to do so.”

“Who?”

“Consort Han.”

Fu Rou was initially startled but later smiled softly. “I believe Consort Han has her reasons.”

Official Situ found Fu Rou’s reaction rather pleasing as she nodded and explained, “Many years ago, I received a favor from the Duke Lu Residence. Now that Consort Han has requested something from me, I definitely have to repay her. Head Seamstress Fu, do you know what the Internal Entry Examination is for?”

Fu Rou replied, "Anyone who just entered the palace must learn palace etiquette. One is only considered to have learnt palace etiquette when they pass the Internal Entry Examination. If they do not pass, it means they have not fully learned the etiquette. Not only would they get punished, they also won't be promoted even if they are excellent at their job."

"You have only got half right." Official Situ replied warmly, "The Internal Entry Examination tests people in the internal palace. Within these four walls, all ladies and palace maids from the three palaces and six courtyards as well as female officials from the six offices and twenty-four departments exist solely for the Emperor. As long as you pass the Internal Entry Examination, it means you are ready to belong to the Emperor."

All of a sudden, Fu Rou understood.

"With the status of an official palace lady, regardless of whether the Emperor favors you, you cannot marry unless the Emperor personally grants you marriage. Even if one of the nobles is gracious and allows you to leave the palace, you will only be able to become a nun or remain single for the rest of your life." Official Situ gazed at Fu Rou. "Do you understand why Consort Han requested what she did now?"

Fu Rou bowed deeply. "I understand. I'll have to thank Consort Han and you, Official Situ, for taking care of me."

Although the palace was a dangerous place, there were still people that were sincere that she could make friends with to get through it. She only hoped that Sheng Chumu was as lucky as her and could find someone to help him out.

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Sheng Chumu had taken two thousand of Lu Yunji's troops and taken down Nine Pillar City, a city that was rumoured to never be able to fall. Moreover he did not lose any soldiers. However, the Lu father and son pair merely came over to take advantage of the fallen city and did not even thank him.

"I think that bastard just wants to kill you! The number of troops he gives you decreases with each order. Does he think you just need to use your mouth to win? If it is that easy, he should ask his timid son to attack the Nine Pillar City!" Fu Tao cursed on his behalf.

Sheng Chumu only thought about how he could finally catch up on sleep. He tilted his head and lay flat on the wooden bed.

"Sheng Chumu, are you still my teacher? You don't have any spirit as a man!" Sheng Chumu was so mighty when they were walking the streets of Guangzhou. Now, he was listless.

"I don't want to be a man." He just wanted to live to return to Chang'an and to be by Fu Rou's side. "Moreover, attacking the Nine Pillar City was pretty easy. The time was right and the conditions were favourable."

First, he took down a portion of the city wall to analyse what material it was made of. Then he studied the constellations to determine which day the sun would be blazing the most. Before that

day arrived, he ordered his two thousand troops to dig a channel to redirect water from a nearby river to flood the bottom of the city wall. When the sun eventually shone, cracks would form on the rammed earth that made up the city walls as they had been soaked. Lastly, he just had to attack. He did not even need to send his troops but merely made use of a catapult to aim at the section of the city wall with cracks. With this pressure, the solid city wall was easily brought down.

Fu Tao was about to speak when the cry of a warhorse could be heard. Its cry shook the heavens.

Sheng Chumu thought the rebel army had attacked and immediately jumped out of bed. He snatched up his sword and headed out. However, as he walked out, he only saw men in the Great Tang uniform, shouting and robbing houses. They were bullying the citizens. Fury burned in Sheng Chumu's eyes. He turned around to look for Lu Yunji. *Who else would dare to do this without the approval of the General?*

Hearing that Sheng Chumu was looking for him, Lu Qi knew that things had gone wrong. The Lu family's fortune came from war valuables. They robbed wherever they attacked. Unfortunately, the Nine Pillar City was not a rich city and most of the war valuables had already entered his pocket. He then allowed the other soldiers to ransack the city. He never thought that they would go through the entire city and create such a big commotion.

Lu Yunji remained calm. "It is a pity that I cannot make use of Sheng Chumu when he is such a talent on the battlefield." His hand sliced at the air. Lu Qi understood. He meant to get rid of Sheng Chumu.

When Sheng Chumu entered, he had yet to open his mouth when Lu Yunji said that he was looking for him.

"You have made great accomplishments by taking down the Nine Pillar City. I wanted to let you rest for a few days but war matters are urgent and we cannot afford to relax. A messenger just came and reported signs of the rebel army along the Anxi Canyon. Take two hundred men with you and locate the rebel army. Report back to me immediately when you have any news."

Sheng Chumu laughed bitterly in his heart. *Lu Yunji really knew no limits*. From two thousand to two hundred. Sooner or later, he would instruct him to go on a mission by himself.

Lu Qi sneered, “We are not asking you to fight, just to investigate. Too many people will make it easier to discover you all. Moreover, this is just a small rebel army. What are you afraid of?”

Sheng Chumu saw blood. “Since it is just a small rebel army, why do you need me, a General, to personally lead men to investigate? Even an Assistant Lieutenant would suffice.”

Lu Yunji said earnestly, “Chumu ah, when in war, one cannot afford to be picky. You can’t be the only one obtaining achievements like attacking the city. We also have to allow others to obtain achievements. Rest assured. When you return, I will reward you accordingly.”

Sheng Chumu laughed. “I will heed your orders.” The more Lu Yunji wanted Sheng Chumu to die, the more determined Sheng Chumu was on staying alive. He was going to receive his reward from the Emperor and piss off this pair of father-son bastards from the Lu family.

When Sheng Chumu returned to his room, he told Fu Tao about how Lu Yunji was sending him to track the rebel army.

“Anxi Canyon?” Fu Tao shouted.

“The Anxi Canyon that is rumoured to be a death ground? Bastard! He is doing it again! How many people is he giving you this time? Don’t tell me that he is only giving you a thousand?”

“Two hundred.” Sheng Chumu had already accepted it.

Fu Tao patted Sheng Chumu’s shoulder sympathetically. “Brother-in-law, just run away. I hate people who defect the most but now I’m advising you to leave. A life as a defector would still be better than slowly getting tortured to death in here.”

“Defect?” It was not that Sheng Chumu did not think of this before. *Why act as fish meat for someone else?* However, “There are close to

eight hundred people in the Duke Lu Residence. My father has been a general his entire life and achieved numerous feats. If I become a defect, what will happen to my parents? What will happen to Fu Rou? What about my two younger brothers that are still in Chang'an? I can't defect."

Fu Tao decided. "Then let me go with you. Even if I die, I will make sure you come out of Anxi Canyon alive."

Sheng Chumu rejected him. "You can't go. Moreover, there is one more thing that I haven't told you. I have to tell you now. The huge fire at your house wasn't an accident." Fu Tao listened as Sheng Chumu told him about the traces of oil found near the Fu Residence after the fire.

His eyes widened. "That fire was started intentionally by someone?"

"The Lu family." Sheng Chumu explained, "Don't ask me why, I am sure it's them. I am just not sure why the Lu family would start the fire."

Fu Tao was stunned. "Lu family? Lu Yunji?"

Sheng Chumu stood beside Fu Tao. "Hence, if I don't return, you must definitely stay alive to seek revenge for your mother and for me." Wordlessly, he lifted his hands and karate-chopped Fu Tao's neck.

Sheng Chumu was not going to let Fu Tao follow him. Mainly because it was too dangerous and even he himself was not certain of coming back alive, much less bringing Fu Tao with him. He also knew how much Fu Rou cared about her family. She already blamed herself so much over Third Madam. In addition, Fu Tao was her most beloved younger brother. Even if he could not protect himself, he should at least protect Fu Tao. Maybe that way, she would blame him less if he really did not make it home!

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On this day, Fu Rou delivered an embroidery piece to Lizheng Palace and bumped into Prince Qin. Prince Qin was only eight years old and still behaved like a child. He did not have the arrogance that was common of the royal family.

He greeted Fu Rou happily and his eyes widened as he caught sight of the embroidery. Alas, he scrunched up his nose and remarked, "It is always flowers and plants. So uninteresting."

Fu Rou treated Prince Qin dearly. "What would Your Highness like?"

Prince Qin thought about it. "Imperial Father recently bestowed a jade flute to me. I would like a pouch to keep my flute. I want it to look impressive and powerful."

"Impressive and powerful? I can't think of anything now, but—" Fu Rou smiled warmly. "I heard that there are a lot of mysterious animals in the Classic of Mountain and Sea. Prince Qin, how about you read the classic and tell me if there is any that catches your attention? I will then help you sew anything you want."

"Okay, it's a deal." Prince Qin ran into the palace happily.

Fu Rou followed him in. She greeted the Empress and Grand Consort Sun before presenting the embroidery.

The reason why Empress Zhangsun was respected by the Emperor was not only because they have gone through numerous hardships as a couple but also because she was extremely thoughtful when it came to establishing relationships. Back then, due to the Xuanwu Gate Coup, a wedge formed between the Emperor and the Grand Emperor to the point that they were no longer willing to see each other. However, as long as the Grand Emperor lived, he was still the Son of Heaven and cannot be neglected. Luckily, Empress Zhangsun was kind and filial to him, ensuring that everything is settled on the Grand Emperor's end.

Grand Consort Sun often came to Lizheng Palace and was close to her daughter-in-law.

“Head Seamstress Fu, your embroidery is outstanding.” Grand Consort Sun was kind and knowledgeable.

Empress Zhangsun was also extremely pleased. She rewarded Fu Rou with a snack from overseas that she momentarily could not recall the name.

Fu Rou reported, “Your Majesty, this snack is called 'turn back'. I grew up in Guangzhou which is near the ocean. There would often be merchants around and I believe I have eaten this before. During the trading season, there would be even more merchants and more interesting snacks. For example, there is a snack I really love called fried scattered dough.”

Grand Consort Sun was intrigued. “I never would have thought that you not only are extremely skilled, you are also knowledgeable.”

Fu Rou remained humble. “I would not dare. It is just the convenience from living beside the ocean.”

Fu Rou told them of numerous interesting stories and everyone was absorbed by her stories. When Empress Zhangsun let her go to finish her duties, Prince Qin ran out after her. He expressed that he no longer wanted the flute pouch but wanted her to tell him more stories. She was delighted that there were people that enjoyed her stories. She promised Prince Qin that she would embroider the flute pouch and tell him stories.

As Fu Rou left Lizheng Palace, she thought that the day had passed rather smoothly. Who knew that she would bump into her jinx -- Prince Zhou.

Seeing the tray that the palace maid behind Fu Rou was carrying, Prince Zhou looked over casually. "I see that Her Majesty rewarded you again. She has given you the Precious Hawksbill Comb. There are only two pieces of this comb and they were given to Her Majesty and my mother. Her Majesty seems to really adore you."

Fu Rou suddenly remembered something. She remembered telling Prince Zhou that the Crown Princess wanted her to alter the dance outfit. Soon after, Prince Zhou wrote about < Admonishing Extravagance > . The timing was too coincidental.

"Prince Zhou, you really know everything that happens in the palace." She thought that he truly meant to advise her, but he was actually getting inspiration for himself.

"To live well here, one has to see and hear everything. Sigh, it is actually pretty tiring. So I have to think of ways to help myself relax." Prince Zhou's tone changed. "Let's go to Lingxiao Palace."

"Again?" Fu Rou blurted out. "For what?"

"Of course. I need to relax." Without waiting for Fu Rou's response, Prince Zhou turned and left. He was confident that she would follow.

Fu Rou laughed bitterly and shook her head. She sent the palace maid back to the Seamstress Department before taking her own sweet time to follow Prince Zhou. When she entered Lingxiao Palace, she noticed numerous flower buds. It seemed like spring was about to arrive.

Prince Zhou noticed that she was assessing her surroundings and explained, "The Emperor ordered the gardeners to plant this recently in order to ask me to stay for a while longer."

"The Emperor really dotes on you." He was the only prince that could still remain in Chang'an after coming of age. "Your Highness, what did you call me here for?"

Prince Zhou moved to the side. “For this.”

A beautiful rainbow swing swayed in the wind. Fu Rou’s expression did not change. “Your Highness, please forgive me but I do not enjoy children’s toys.”

Prince Zhou did not seem bothered. “That’s right, I made a children’s toy. However, Head Seamstress Fu, do you know how swings come about?” Fu Rou was speechless. Even he admitted that it was for children.

“Swings are used for prayers.” Prince Zhou answered his own question. “During the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), it was part of a tradition of Northern tribes. It was introduced into the palace during Emperor Wu’s reign. During the Qingming festival, the rainbow ropes would then be tied to tree branches. They were also used to celebrate the Qianqiu birthdays. Hence, while its original name was Qianqiu (千秋) it was eventually changed to Qiuqian (秋千) to prevent confusion.”

Prince Zhou saw Fu Rou’s attention turn to him.

“Playing on the swing gives one the feeling of flying through the air and that feeling is often referred to as the happiness of half immortals. Hence, it became a long-standing tradition to play on a swing while praying for a long life for people you care about.” Prince Zhou smiled but did not truly feel happy. The only way he could get her attention was to make use of the one she cared about.

Fu Rou looked hopeful. “Can it really...grant a long and peaceful life to those I care about?”

Prince Zhou walked up to the swing and made a sign of invitation.

Fu Rou hesitated before walking up to the swing. After spending so many days and nights missing and thinking of Sheng Chumu, her imagination started to run wild. She needed something to comfort herself, even if it seemed imaginary.

Prince Zhou said that the higher one swung, the more likely their prayers were to come through. Hearing what he said, Fu Rou did not

stop Prince Zhou from pushing the swing and even requested for him to push her higher. She prayed that Sheng Chumu would return safely and live to a hundred. She closed her eyes as she prayed, momentarily forgetting that she was high up in the air. She placed her palms together and was immediately thrown off the swing.

Prince Zhou reacted quickly as he quickly caught her. He shouted in shock, “Rou’er!”

Fu Rou had not been startled from falling from the swing but from hearing him shout “Rou’er”. She shivered as she immediately pulled herself out of Prince Zhou’s grasp and took a few steps backwards.

She spoke seriously, “Rou’er is my intimate name and only those who are close to me are allowed to call me that. Please speak cautiously, Your Highness.”

Looking at his empty hands, Prince Zhou looked up and laughed. “Okay, I will listen to you on this. However, you have to listen to me for the next thing I am going to say. Let’s go ride horses tomorrow.”

Fu Rou frowned. “Your Highness is too demanding. I am a female official in the Ministry of Works, not a palace maid in Lingxiao Palace.” *Should she not have let Prince Zhou bring her out to visit her family? Now it feels like she was controlled by him.*

“All the palace maids in Lingxiao Palace passed the Internal Entry Examination. It seems like the Office of Rites was very strict during Head Seamstress Fu’s Internal Entry Examination. Would you like me to ask His Majesty for a favour and let you become a palace lady earlier?” Prince Zhou obviously knew what had happened. “To avoid serving His Majesty, you intentionally collaborated with Official Situ in the Office of Rites to fail the examination. Isn’t this despicable? I was curious. Official Situ has such poor relationships with others. Why would Head Seamstress Fu help her out when she was in trouble in the Eastern Palace? I became curious and went to investigate. I found out that the two had made a pact. No wonder.”

“Don’t make it sound so bad. Official Situ is cold on the outside but sincere on the inside. She is a good person.” There were friendships in the Royal Palace. On the other hand, Prince Zhou’s ability to

obtain information was scary.

“Okay, you are all good people. I am the bad one. Then let me outrightly threaten you. Tomorrow, you shall go ride horses with me.” He finally understood. Currently, he could only use his status to threaten her. But as long as he doesn’t give up, he could achieve anything.

Fu Rou was unwilling. “...Understood.”

Prince Zhou’s eyes turned into a crescent shape as he smiled. “Head Seamstress Fu.”

Fu Rou was in a bad mood. “What other instructions do you have for me?”

Prince Zhou’s eyes glittered. “Did you know that you look especially cute when you are angry?”

Fu Rou stared at him. She opened her mouth but eventually left without saying a single word.

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The following day, Fu Rou was once again dressed up as Prince Zhou's bodyguard as she left the palace with him. They were in the outskirts of the city. Sunlight shone down on rice seedlings as the first signs of green burst through the brown earth. Spring had just arrived.

"Head Seamstress Fu really knows how to do a lot of things." Prince Zhou, however, was only focused on the sight of Fu Rou on her horse.

"My brother learned how to ride and shoot, I know a little from him." Fu Rou turned away from appreciating the scenery to look at Prince Zhou. She did not see his handsome features but could only focus on his evil smile.

"There aren't as many rules outside the palace and it would sound weird to other people if they overheard us. Let's call each other casually." Prince Zhou wanted to get closer.

Fu Rou obeyed. "I have done as you requested. With regard to the Internal Entry Examination, can you promise to keep it a secret?"

"Well, it depends on whether I am happy with your company today." Prince Zhou's eyes narrowed. "It looks like you can improve on your horse-riding skills. Let me teach you."

In the beginning, everything went smoothly. Under Prince Zhou's

guidance, Fu Rou was better able to control her horse. As she had a taste of what it felt like to be in control, she slowly grew in love with the feeling of riding through the wind. She subconsciously loosened her grip on the reins and allowed the horse to run faster. When Prince Zhou returned from being absorbed in Fu Rou's smile, he realised that Fu Rou was now galloping wildly and quickly caught up with her. He simultaneously shouted, "Grab onto the reins!"

Fu Rou panicked as the strong wind stung her face. She was not able to sit properly as she reached out and grabbed onto the horse's neck. This caused the horse to rebel and it kicked up its hooves to throw her off.

"Ahh—" Fu Rou shrieked. Her hands slipped as she was horrified to realise that she had been thrown into the air.

In less than a split second, she collided into a firm warm body. She turned her head back only to see a face close to her. She wanted to push him away, but his two arms were stiff like steel. He was determined not to let her escape.

As Fu Rou was lost as to what to do, a furious farmer ran out of the alley. "My rice seedlings! You have to compensate me, or I will report you to the officials!"

Prince Zhou reluctantly released Fu Rou. He sighed as he reached for his waist. It was only then that he realized he had forgotten to bring his pouch. He then retrieved a fan that was attached to his belt.

"Take this fan to the Huangsan Satin Manor in the main street of Chang'an. Tell them that the owner of this fan instructs them to give you five silver taels for this fan."

"Five silver taels for a fan? Are you lying to me?" The farmer did not believe him.

Fu Rou spoke up, "It is my fault for not controlling my horse well and ruining your rice plantation. But please believe that we sincerely wish to compensate you."

Prince Zhou could not help but smile when he heard her use the

word ‘we’.

The farmer looked at Fu Rou before turning to Prince Zhou. Both of them looked upright and honest. He chose to believe them and kept the fan.

After this incident, Fu Rou did not wish to ride any longer and Prince Zhou brought her to a wine house.

“You seem so demure and I didn’t think that you could look so dashing on a horse. You gave me another surprise.” He really could not get tired of her. Not only did he not get sick of her, he was liking her more.

Fu Rou found it hard to look into his eyes. “I did not think that you would compensate the farmer instead of threatening him with your authority.”

Prince Zhou’s eyebrows rose. “This sounds like you are complimenting me.”

“...I say it as it is.” Fu Rou paused. “I want to thank you.”

“No matter what, it is rare for you to compliment me. Let me treat you to a good meal.” Prince Zhou called for the waiter and asked for him to serve them the most expensive meal and put it on Huangsan Satin Manor’s tab.

“It doesn’t matter what I eat. I am satisfied as long as it fills me. Whether the food is good or bad is just to satisfy one’s desire for good food. I am afraid that you have wasted your efforts.” Fu Rou knew that the Huangsan Satin Manor was most likely Prince Zhou’s personal property and she need not worry about the bill.

“Have you heard of the saying that food is everything?” *Just desire for good food?*

“It is a common saying among the people, of course I have heard of it.” Fu Rou did not think much of it.

“You are wrong.” Prince Zhou was filled with confidence. “This phrase came from < < Han Dynasty: The History of Food > > . The

Emperor treats his people as his everything while his people treat food as their everything. Gu Defen then wrote about the eight important things of the nation in his book < <History of Zhou> > . The first is food, second is goods, third is religion, fourth is work, fifth is education, sixth is justice, seventh are guests and eight is teacher. Food was listed as first. Let me ask you another question, everyone always says the empire runs the state and the state runs the empire. Do you know what this state represents?"

Fu Rou shook her head but was curious. She didn't find him completely intolerable due to his scholarly knowledge.

"Ever since ancient times, the millet has been hailed at the king of grains. Hence, the past emperors have always treated millet as the God of Harvest and that is why they are able to rule." *They are hence treated as the rightful son of heaven because they are able to fill people's hunger.*

Fu Rou looked at him in admiration. "You have such profound knowledge. You must read a lot of books."

"I have read a lot of books, more than you would believe. When I can't sleep and have nothing to do, I can only light a lamp and read to pass the night." The corners of Prince Zhou's lip rose but one could see the suffering behind his smile.

From his expression, Fu Rou was also able to know a lot. She smartly decided to stop asking. Turning her head, she looked out into the crowded street and froze.

Prince Zhou noticed her reaction and looked over. His eyes quickly landed on a handsome looking man.

He asked, "Is that someone you know?"

Shaking her head, Fu Rou explained, "I am not on familiar terms with him. It is just that he played Zhao Zilong very well in the Han Residence."

Prince Zhou exclaimed, "Oh, so he is an actor."

Fu Rou noticed the shift in Prince Zhou's tone and narrowed her eyes.

“So what if he is an actor? He isn’t going to influence your high and mighty status.”

Right at that moment, Chen Ji met with someone. They exchanged a short but light-hearted conversation before they left. Walking shoulder to shoulder, it was obvious that the two were on familiar terms. Fu Rou and Prince Zhou both fell silent upon seeing this. The Crown Prince was the person who spoke with Chen Ji.

Fu Rou took a slight glance at Prince Zhou. She saw that he seemed to not care as he started to dig into the food again. Fu Rou relaxed and continued to eat her food.

Court Lady

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Sheng Chumu and a small group of troops were having a break in the forest, all of them completely exhausted and injured. Repeated waves of attacks from rebel troops had wiped out his forces and from two hundred men and he was now left with a few men.

Sheng Chumu knew that someone must have tipped off the enemy. If not, how could so many rebel troops appear at Anxi Canyon all of a sudden. Of course, he knew who this person was even if he used his toes to think.

At this very moment, the Anxi Canyon was a huge hunting ground. Escaping was like ascending to heaven. However, he did not give up on everyone's hope to live. He was willing to suck out poisonous blood from his comrades and he dared to eat live snake meat with his troops. Even if there was only a thin thread of hope for survival, Sheng Chumu would find it.

Sheng Chumu took out a cloth map and studied it. "Our road has been drenched in blood. We are now familiar with the terrain and the enemy camps in the area. I added all these details onto the map. If any of us manages to escape, give this map to Assistant Lieutenant Xi Tao. Our troops would not have died in vain if this map allows our army an advantage in Anxi Canyon in the future."

Assistant Lieutenant Xi Tao was Fu Tao. At that time, Fu Tao was

afraid others would find out who he was and create trouble. Hence, he purposely gave a false name. Sheng Chumu slowly got used to it. The Lu family would not have imagined that Xi Tao and the Fu family would be related.

No one dared to take the map from Sheng Chumu and everyone pledged their loyalty to Sheng Chumu, declaring that they would sacrifice themselves to let Sheng Chumu escape.

“There is no way I am going to let that happen.” Sheng Chumu was troubled internally but he maintained an optimistic look. “If the enemy troops surround us and they demand my life because I took down many of their cities, I will reveal who I am and lure the main troops away. Will you guys be able to escape?”

The troops knew that Sheng Chumu was right.

“How am I supposed to break through leading all you clumsy fellows?” As the troops took turns to look at the map, he continued, “Remember, you must only pass this map to Assistant Lieutenant Xi Tao. Relay my orders to him. He must pass this map personally to General Lu.”

Having been by his side all this while, Fu Tao should be able to understand what he was trying to do, right? *Please lord!*

All of a sudden, the rebel army shouted “Sheng Chumu” as they searched at the periphery of the jungle. They were about to enter the jungle anytime now. Sheng Chumu gritted his teeth as he dashed out of the jungle and ran to the side of the canyon. Just as the rebel army surged towards him and surrounded him with a murderous aura, he turned and jumped down the canyon.

A few days later, Fu Tao received the tragic news of Sheng Chumu falling off the cliff after being chased by rebel troops from two soldiers who had been lucky to survive. The soldiers handed over the map to him and expressed that Sheng Chumu asked him to personally hand it over to Lu Yunji.

Fu Tao had to hold himself back from killing Lu Yunji to seek revenge for his mother and Sheng Chumu. He knew why Sheng Chumu gave

the map to him. He wanted him to claim merit and get close to the Lu father and son, waiting for the right time to take his revenge. After following Sheng Chumu in so many battles, he learned the importance of strategy. Even though he knew the opponent was superficial, he had to bear with it.

“There are only two survivors among those who went with General Sheng. I saw them the moment they entered Nine Pillar City. I immediately brought them to meet you. They also carried a map of Anxi Canyon with them that I will present to you.”

Fu Tao gave the map to Lu Yunji.

Lu Yunji took the map as his eyes lit up. With this, the army could easily deal with the rebel troops in Anxi Canyon. He was going to return victorious!

Lu Qi stood at a corner in the room. He surveyed Fu Tao and suggested, “Father, you are short of personal guards. Why don’t you give him a chance?”

Lu Yunji truly appreciated Fu Tao. “Lieutenant Xi, are you willing to become my personal guard?”

“Thank you for your grace. I am willing to die for you!” Fu Tao said each word with conviction.

“Good!” Lu Yunji was overjoyed.

At this point, his personal guards entered the room. Two of them held the heads of beheaded soldiers. Fu Tao exclaimed in shock, “Aren’t these the two soldiers who managed to survive Anxi Canyon?”

Lu Yunji wore a cruel expression. “A coward who abandons his general and escapes must be killed. If I do not kill them, how am I to establish the rules for the army. How am I going to answer to the Emperor and Duke Lu?” Lu Yunji gave an order to his personal guards. “Hang these heads outside the city and let everyone know the consequences of cowardice.”

Fu Tao gritted his teeth. Lu Yunji was merciless; he had to be careful from now on.

The Crown Prince had called for Chen Ji and Chen Ji arrived at the Eastern Palace today. After spending some time with the Crown Prince, Chen Ji knew that the Crown Prince was in a good mood today. As he expected, the Crown Prince wore a bright expression when he entered the room.

“Your Highness.” Chen Ji bowed towards the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince took out a bow and placed it on the table. “This is for you.”

Chen Ji stepped forward and commented, “It is a good bow.”

“I presented the < < Han Dynasty > > to my Imperial Father today. He was very pleased and gave me many praises and gifts. This bow is one of the items that he gave me. But I am used to my own bow and I have no use for this one. This is for you.”

Not only that, the Emperor had punished Prince Zhou for the incident of his horse trampling over farmers’ crops and Prince Zhou received twenty strokes. The Crown Prince felt relief.

Chen Ji thanked the Crown Prince.

“You don’t have to thank me. Sing a song for me.” The Crown Prince smiled.

“Alright. Which song?” After interacting with the Crown Prince for so long, Chen Ji found him to be an easy-going person.

“Changbanpo.” The Crown Prince requested.

“Aren’t you sick of hearing that song?” Despite his remark, Chen Ji started to sing for the Crown Prince.

Sun Lingshu was about to enter the room with Shuangxi, to deliver the ginseng soup. Seeing the Crown Prince so intrigued by Chen Ji’s performance, Sun Lingshu also broke into a smile. Just as she was about to step into the room, the Crown Prince waved dismissively, indicating that he did not want her to interrupt. Shuangxi quietly

asked, “Why is His Highness acting this way? Didn’t His Highness say that he was not going to investigate the matter regarding Official Situ and make up with you, Crown Princess?”

The Crown Prince had deduced that the three missing pearls incident was a scheme by Sun Lingshu. However, he could understand her reasons as he had not given her much attention and understood that she did it to get his attention. As such, he has recently started treating her better.

Sun Lingshu sighed, “The Crown Prince has always loved listening to that song, he isn’t annoyed at me.” However, she was feeling worried.

Meanwhile, Sheng Chuling arrived on another side.

Sheng Chuling had been influenced by his brother’s hard work. In addition, to see Princess Xinnan more, he applied for a role in the palace. However, fate was not on his side and he was assigned to be a guard at the Eastern Palace. He felt like although he was here, his heart was somewhere else.

“Why do you always look at the entrance?” Imperial Guard Fan, a fellow guard, asked Sheng Chuling curiously.

“The Imperial family is still a family. As the eldest brother in the family, why is the Crown Prince’s residence so far from the princess’ residences?” Sheng Chuling wondered out loud.

Imperial Guard Fan chuckled, “Why? Are you trying to chase after a princess?”

“No!” Sheng Chuling denied fervently.

“By asking where the princess lives, you are very suspicious. I will report to the higher ups.” Imperial Guard Fan teased him.

“Brother Fan, please don’t. I owe you two bottles of wine. Once our duty ends today, I will bring you to Swallow House. I will even request for Swallow House’s top beauty, Yan’er, if you want.”

Imperial Guard Fan gave a thumbs up. “Okay.”

Sheng Chuling thought to himself. *Wine and brothel houses aren't that useless after all. I can use it to chase Princess Xinnan.*

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“What? Prince Zhou was caned?”

Just as she was about to sleep, Fu Rou jumped up in shock upon hearing Shu'er's words. The Crown Prince had presented < < Han Shu > > during court today and the Emperor had been overjoyed about it. On the other hand, a court official filed a report on Prince Zhou and the Emperor had punished him with twenty strokes of the cane.

Shu'er confirmed, “That is right. The Emperor has always doted on Prince Zhou. No one expected that he would punish Prince Zhou out of anger this time.”

Fu Rou asked, “Why was the Emperor angry?”

“Mmhmm...” Shu'er replied, “It seems like Prince Zhou trampled on some farmer's crops with his horse. He ran away but accidentally left his fan behind. Eventually, the court official found out about the incident and reported it to the Emperor.”

Fu Rou thought to herself. She was clearly the one who lost control of the horse. Furthermore, Prince Zhou did not run away. He left his fan as a compensation for the farmer. Someone was clearly manipulating and taking advantage of the situation.

This incident was her fault, but she knew there was nothing she could

say. The next morning, she went to Lingxiao Palace.

Coincidentally, Concubine Yan walked out of the palace and Fu Rou bowed towards her. Concubine Yan's troubled expression eased slightly, and she glanced at Fu Rou's hands. Fu Rou's hands were empty.

"Head Seamstress Fu, are you here to deliver embroidery?" Concubine Yan asked. Fu Rou subconsciously replied, "Yes."

Concubine Yan's tone remained unchanged. "Prince Zhou's body is weak after being punished and he must not be alarmed. The embroideries you deliver this time should not be too bright. Please focus on light and calming embroideries."

Fu Rou replied, "I understand."

"Continue to work hard." Concubine Yan walked past Fu Rou.

Fu Rou puzzled over Concubine Yan's words as she entered the hall. Lifting her gaze, she found that Prince Zhou was smiling at her. However, she also noticed that his complexion was pale.

"Your Highness, why were you willing to be punished by the Emperor? Why didn't you just explain that the person who trampled over the farmer's crops was me?"

"Are you feeling guilty?" *If that was the case, his punishment was worth it.*

"Yes, I am feeling very guilty." *Undeserved rewards should be declined.*

"You don't have to feel guilty. I was protecting myself, not you. My punishment for trampling over crops at the very most is caning. The crime for bringing a lady out of the palace is more severe." Although she was honest, Prince Zhou could not take credit.

"Regardless, I have to thank you."

One led the other out and the other followed. He was punished but she escaped unscathed.

“Do you want to express your gratitude to me? Sure. You can help me read some history books. You can deepen your understanding of the world and understand the people around you as well.” Prince Zhou pointed at the book on the table.

Fu Rou retrieved the book < <The Book of Changes> > . She read and thought of something.

She recalled this morning’s events when she went to meet Empress Zhangsun. The Crown Prince happened to be there too. They had talked about Prince Zhou. The Empress had advised the Crown Prince to visit Prince Zhou more so as to not allow others to gossip about their relationship. The Crown Prince was bothered that the Emperor was biased towards Prince Zhou. Prince Zhou was supposed to get fifty strokes of the cane, but the Emperor punished him with thirty strokes. The Empress believed that perhaps a few strokes was enough to reduce Prince Zhou’s arrogance.

When Fu Rou heard this, she felt extremely uncomfortable. Although the princes had different mothers, they were ultimately still brothers. However, she could not sense a single thread of affection between them and instead, they were always fighting against each other. She suddenly thought of her own siblings and became thankful that she was born in the Fu family.

The situation with the Crown Princess made things worse. In front of the Empress, the Crown Prince brought up the number of embroideries the Crown Princess was receiving and asked her to pay more attention to the Crown Princess. Fu Rou knew that the Crown Princess was still holding a grudge against her for the incident with the pearls and could not say much.

Fu Rou sighed.

Prince Zhou raised his brows, assuming that Fu Rou was sighing because of the book. “Although < <The Book of Changes> > is difficult, studying it is necessary as it encompasses the physical science of the world as well as changes in living organisms. It is just that humans are interested in ourselves and cannot fully comprehend the mysterious nature of the world. Eventually, this book became one of divine nature.”

Fu Rou focused back on the present and placed the book down. "I am afraid that I won't be able to study this well."

If she read while she had other thoughts in her mind, she wouldn't be able to understand.

"You don't have to rush it. This book cannot be learnt in one or two days." Prince Zhou gestured to the medicine bowls sitting on top of the table. "Give me the medicine first."

Fu Rou looked at the medicine before looking at Prince Zhou. As she saw him look like he was waiting to be fed, she knew he wanted her to feed him. She frowned and remained still.

"Head Seamstress Fu, when you said that you wanted to thank me, was it all talk?" Prince Zhou smiled, lying lazily.

Fu Rou sighed once again as she resigned to her fate and picked up the medicine bowl. Sitting by the side of the couch, she delivered medicine to Prince Zhou spoonful by spoonful. Fu Rou finally fed Prince Zhou the last scoop when she saw some medicine by the side of Prince Zhou's mouth. She casually took out a handkerchief and leaned forward to help him wipe it off. However, she could sense Prince Zhou's burning gaze on her and wanted to take back her hand. It was a pity she reacted too late. In a swift motion, Prince Zhou grabbed onto Fu Rou's wrist and looked at her intensely. Fu Rou pulled back her hand resolutely.

Prince Zhou appeared regretful as he retrieved his own handkerchief and slowly wiped the corners of his mouth.

Fu Rou stared. "That is my handkerchief, why is it with Your Highness?" She reached for it.

Prince Zhou reacted quickly, and put it away. "I am a prince, young, handsome and well-read. My riding and archery skills are excellent as well. How am I inferior in any way to Sheng Chumu, who does not even have a good reputation?"

He had gotten the handkerchief on the night where Fu Rou had gone to meet Sheng Chumu before he set off. She had accidentally dropped

the handkerchief in the Imperial Garden. He picked it up and took the chance to find out a few things.

Prince Zhou's words threw Fu Rou into a state of shock. "How...how do you know about him?"

"Did you think I wouldn't investigate just because you don't tell me? It is also not a secret that Sheng Chumu made a bet with Lu Yunji's son because of you."

"When did you find out?"

"Long ago."

"Long ago? Then you..."

"What about me? Have I ever done anything to him?" Prince Zhou wanted to laugh but could not. He brought up < <The Book of Changes> > that Fu Rou had just read. "In part thirty-six of the book, it states that bodies can be brought back anytime."

Fu Rou froze. "You!"

Prince Zhou waved. "I am joking. He is fighting for Great Tang, so how can I wish for something to happen to him? I just hope that when he comes back, he will bring with him a maiden that he rescued from the battlefield. Then I will do all I can to wish them all the best. With that, Head Seamstress Fu can focus on staying with me and reading to me." *She should understand his feelings by now.*

Fu Rou suddenly stood up and bowed to Prince Zhou. She could not accept nor bear his feelings towards her. Her heart has already been occupied and cannot let anyone else in.

As she walked to the Imperial Garden, Fu Rou caught sight of Yang Bo and a group of attendants huddled together. She thought they were starting another illegal bet but accidentally heard them mention someone dying on the battlefield. Her heart could not help but skip a beat as she walked over.

As soon as Yang Bo caught sight of Fu Rou, he immediately disbanded the group. He greeted her before running far away. Fu Rou

narrowed her eyes before quickly catching up with one of the attendants. "What were you all talking about?"

The internal attendant did not understand the situation. "We received an urgent report today. The son of Duke Lu has died on the battlefield."

Fu Rou suddenly felt as if her world had collapsed. "What did you say?" She grabbed onto the attendant's arm. "Say it one more time!"

The internal attendant froze as he sensed Fu Rou's change in emotion. He subconsciously replied, "The son of Duke Lu. The one that won the Imperial Competition previously. He had gone with Great General Lu to the battlefield and it was said that he was surrounded by the rebel army. He was unable to overpower them and died on the battlefield."

Fu Rou's vision blackened as if she had fallen down an endless pit.

Meanwhile, a messenger reached Duke Lu Residence.

"Died in battle?" Sheng Chuling glared at the messenger from the palace. *Was he dreaming?*

He was on roster today and had been appointed at the last minute to Princess Xinnan's palace. He had helped her retrieve a lotus lantern from the water and saw her face of joy. It immediately resolved the longing he had been feeling the past few days and he had been feeling like he was in a dream.

"The Emperor received an urgent message and immediately instructed me to relay the message to Duke Lu." The eunuch's expression was pained. "...my condolences." He then turned and left.

Madam Sheng shut her eyes and fainted. Sheng Chujun caught onto her while shouting, "This cannot be true. Elder Brother is so capable. How can he die in battle!"

Sheng Chuling gritted his teeth. "Lu Yunji will not get away with this!"

“That’s right!” Sheng Chujun glared murderously. “He is the Main General while Elder Brother is the Assistant General. Now that Elder Brother is gone, how can he be safe? Let’s go to the Emperor! Lu Yunji must pay for Elder Brother’s life!”

Sheng Xiaojing bellowed, “Everyone shut up! There are risks in everything. It is not rare for armies to be wiped out. Once one has decided to join the army, one must be prepared to lose their life on the battlefield. Chumu was surrounded by the rebel army and killed. How can you ask the Emperor to punish Lu Yunji?! What logic is that!”

“But this is clearly Lu Yunji’s plot!” Even Sheng Chuling knew this without having to think hard.

“Father! Elder Brother’s death is too unfair!” Sheng Chujun could not accept this.

“Taking down numerous rebel cities one after the other and never backing down. He has brought glory to our country. Good! He is definitely worthy of being my son...”

Blood spurted out of Sheng Xiaojing’s mouth and he fainted as well. He was once an unrivalled warrior, but in the end, he still lost his son to the enemy.

Any guesses on what will happen to Chumu?

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On this day, the funeral was held at the Duke Lu Residence. Because Sheng Chumu had died on the battlefield and his body was not brought back, they only had a cenotaph.

Prince Zhou attended the entire procession and saw numerous beautiful ladies from all over Chang'an come to attend his funeral. They cried as if their intestines had been ripped apart. This scene made Prince Zhou angry, wanted to laugh and also made him look up to Sheng Chumu slightly. He had a reputation of being a playboy, yet he was not hated. It was clear that he was popular but not despicable. Prince Zhou returned to the palace after the funeral and immediately went to find Fu Rou. He was not going to take advantage of her while she was hurting but he could not allow her to sacrifice herself for Sheng Chumu. However, as he reached the door to her room, he could hear a commotion from inside the room.

Shu'er, who had been serving Fu Rou, was sprawling on the floor. Rites Official Situ was standing in front of the couch as a few attendants were struggling to pull an unconscious Fu Rou. They were led by the Head of the Sick House, Zhao Lingban.

"What is going on?" Prince Zhou spoke in a deep tone.

Shu'er crawled to Prince Zhou. "Your Highness, they want to take Head Seamstress Fu to the Sick House."

The Sick House was where people who were critically ill in the palace spent their last days. Going there was equivalent to death.

Zhao Lingban was surprised and confused. He did not expect Prince Zhou to interfere as he quickly reported, “Your Highness, Head Seamstress Fu has been ill for numerous days and shows no signs of recovering. Your servant is merely acting according to the palace rules and does not dare to delay any longer.”

“I am aware of the rules. “Prince Zhou narrowed his eyes. “However, even if you want to bring her to the Sick House, you have to let her pack up. By behaving so cruelly, you are ruining Imperial Father and Mother’s virtuous reputation. Come back in four hours.”

“This...” Zhao Lingban was following someone’s orders and he thought back on what he had to do.

Prince Zhou looked at him icily. “Is there a problem?”

Zhao Lingban’s scalp tingled. “Yes, yes, I will heed Your Highness’ orders.” He lifted his hand and the rest of the attendants left with him.

The news of Prince Zhou standing up for Fu Rou and stopping Zhao Lingban from bringing Fu Rou to the Sick House was told to Sun Lingshu. Shuangxi had used the Crown Princess’ name to make Zhao Lingban go to Fu Rou.

“I said not to meddle with her, why did you do something like this? You didn’t even ask me beforehand. If the Crown Prince were to know about this, aren’t you bringing me trouble?” Lately, all she thought about was how to capture the Crown Prince’s heart.

“I felt injustice for you.” Shuangxi protested, “This is not considered meddling with her. The palace has palace rules. She is not even a noble, she is simply a female official. When someone like her falls severely ill, they have to be sent to the Sick House. I merely informed Zhao Lingban and he simply acted according to the rules.”

Sun Lingshu closed one eye and brushed over the incident. “Okay, okay. Leave this incident as it is, don’t interfere anymore. Since the

Crown Prince wants me to rest, then I will rest my body. She can fall ill or die for all I care. She is simply a female official and I cannot be bothered with her. From now on, don't waste your effort."

"Yes." Shuangxi obeyed, "However, if not for her illness this time, we wouldn't know that she had gotten Prince Zhou on her side. In my opinion, she is extremely scheming. I am afraid that she is aiming high."

A slight smile appeared on Sun Lingshu's face. "Even though she is really capable, she can't ever be his official wife. She is simply warming his bed."

Four hours later, the internal attendants came to get Fu Rou. However, it was Yang Bo that came. She was not sent into the Sick House but to Concubine Yan's palace.

Actually, Prince Zhou had requested for Concubine Yan to step in and help Fu Rou. The explanation for outsiders was when Prince Zhou had gotten punished, Concubine Yan had made a promise in the temple. As long as Prince Zhou recovered, she would personally save someone else. Fu Rou was fortunate to become the recipient of Concubine Yan's promise.

Concubine Yan understood. She had never seen her son interested in any woman. Now that fate had it, she could help lay a cold towel on her forehead.

"Thank you for agreeing to my request, Mother." Prince Zhou was grateful.

"After so many years of suffering, seeing you happy makes me happy." Not only did Concubine Yan not stop him, she even tried to please her son. "It is late now, and I am tired. As my son, you should help me fulfil my promise. Understand?"

Prince Zhou laughed as he bowed politely. "Have a good night, Mother."

Prince Zhou waited until Concubine Yan left before straightening up

and sitting by the couch. His eyes did not leave Fu Rou. He suddenly leaned over and placed his cheek against her forehead. Her temperature was boiling, and his heart raced.

Fu Rou muttered in pain, “Chumu...Chumu...”

Prince Zhou murmured softly, “Rou’er, Rou’er, Sheng Chumu has died. Forget about him.”

The sky and ocean were shades of blue. Birds skimmed the surface of the water before flying high. Fishes swam in the ocean. The boat rose and dipped silently, guided by the motion of the wave. Laying on the deck, a person stared into the endless sky.

“So boring—”

The man shouted. He suddenly jumped up and scanned the black shadow that was nearing him. In a flash, the two met. The person was then held down onto the deck of the boat by the black shadow. One side of his face was flattened.

“Hey, hey, I am still injured. You win without a fight.” That voice was clearly Sheng Chumu.

“I am only here to remind you to change your medicine.” The black shadow spoke in a cold tone. His expression was stiff. It was Fang Ziyan. “Don’t forget who was the one that helped force the seawater out of you and saved your life.”

That day replayed itself in Sheng Chumu’s eyes. Fang Ziyan brought his mouth close to Sheng Chumu, his face as big as a humongous pancake. Shen Chumu made a vomiting motion and struggled to sit up. “I already forgot.”

Fang Ziyan snorted, “Are you even a man? Such a sissy!”

Sheng Chumu retorted, “If I weren’t a man, would you be hoping I’d repay you with my body?”

Fang Ziyan exploded, “Nonsense! If not for your General Dingyuan

badge, I wouldn't care if you live or die!"

"Badge?" Sheng Chumu suddenly patted himself as his eyes scanned his waist. "Where's my pouch?"

"Never seen it." *He's going to play stupid.*

"Rou'er made it for me!" Sheng Chumu panicked.

"I don't know." *He's both jealous and envious.*

"My badge is still here. I purposely attached the pouch to my belt; how can it disappear?" Sheng Chumu found it odd.

"You were floating in the ocean and your clothes were torn and tattered. It is considered a feat that we could even fish you out. Am I supposed to take responsibility for your items as well? Most likely, the pouch that you are talking about had already fallen into the ocean."

Sheng Chumu became suspicious. "Did you steal—" Fang Ziyan smacked his injury. Sheng Chumu's face cramped from the pain.

"Your injury hasn't even recovered, and it's like you are half-dead. How dare you bicker with me?"

Ma Haihu ran over and called happily, "Leader, we have found the guys from Suicide Nine!"

Sheng Chumu asked, "Who?"

Fang Ziyan glanced at him. "Pirates."

Sheng Chumu analyzed seriously. "The name itself already sounds more powerful than your sect. So, you are jealous and hate them. Are you going to do dirty on a fellow pirate?"

In one motion, Fang Ziyan grabbed the back of Sheng Chumu's shirt and dragged him to the hold of the ship. With a rope, Fang Ziyan wrapped it around Sheng Chumu and turned him into a dumpling. Ignoring his shouts and curses, Fang Ziyan shut the door on him and left.

Sheng Chumu shouted until he became hoarse, but no one bothered about him. Clashing sounds could be heard from the outside. It seemed like they were really fighting.

After some time had passed, the door opened once again. “Hey, leader of the pirates—” Sheng Chumu perked up.

Who knew that the person who entered wasn’t Fang Ziyan but a huge burly looking girl. She was dressed similarly to the other pirates, with a short-sleeved shirt and a mid-length skirt. She even had long pants and leather boots.

The huge girl walked up and loosened some of the ropes around Sheng Chumu without saying anything. Sheng Chumu’s hands were still tied and he could only move his body. “Who are you? What do you want?” *There were female pirates?*

“I am Ma Hainiu. My brother asked me to come and change medicine for you. Oh right, my brother is Ma Haihu.” She then pulled open Sheng Chumu’s shirt. Ma Hainiu’s eyes glimmered as she reached out to poke his white chest. “Wah, you are the most muscular man I have seen. I like you!”

Sheng Chumu rolled his eyes. “I already have someone in my heart. Furthermore—” His gaze brushed over Ma Hainiu. “I don’t like such muscular women. Males and females should keep their distance. Don’t touch me however you like.”

“What distance?” Ma Hainiu did not understand him.

“Males and females should keep their distance!” Sheng Chumu purposely repeated.

“If males and females don’t get together, then how do they have children?” Ma Hainiu swallowed her saliva. She switched from poking to stroking him as she clicked her tongue in admiration of what she was feeling.

Sheng Chumu blushed. “Who wants to have children with you? Don’t touch me!”

Ma Hainiu’s expression turned serious. “You are tied up, what can

you do? I like to touch you so I will do as I like.” She pointed all ten of her fingers into the air and started to polish his beautiful looking chest.

Sheng Chumu bellowed, “I am the Assistant General Dingyuan of the Great Tang. If you dare to do anything to me, I will chop off your hands!”

Ma Hainiu’s eyes seemed to turn into stars. “So, you are an Assistant General. Wow, wow. You must be the best looking and most capable man in the world, after our leader, of course. When you shout, you sound so heroic. Shout louder, I want to hear you.”

Sheng Chumu immediately fell silent. After a moment, he suddenly stretched out his neck and yelled, “Fang Ziyan! Come here right now! Fang Ziyan, you bastard! How can you use such a despicable method?!” *This woman is too horrifying!*

Court Lady

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Fu Rou leaned against the bed. Her face resembled a withered flower, devoid of any colour. When she woke up, she realised that she was not in her room but did not even bother asking where she was. Prince Zhou was trying to coax her into taking her medicine. Although the spoon had been held in front of her for very long, she ignored it. Tears streamed down her face.

“You finally woke up after being unconscious for so long. Are you just going to keep on crying and not say anything? Are you going to cry until you go blind? Or are you going to starve yourself?”

Fu Rou shook her head but continued sobbing. “If he didn’t make a bet with Lu Qi for me, he would not have gone to the Imperial Competition. If he did not go to the Imperial Competition, he wouldn’t have obtained the title of General Dingyuan from the Emperor and be sent onto the battlefield. If he hadn’t been sent to fight, he wouldn’t have died such a terrible death.”

“So you intend to starve and sacrifice yourself for him?” *Is she so stupid?*

Yes, what’s the point of living if she killed the person she loved?! Fu Rou turned her head once again and Prince Zhou’s spoon was left in the air.

Prince Zhou placed the bowl down angrily and took big strides

towards the door.

When would she ever have him in her eyes? As a royal, even though he was not the Empress' child, he was still of noble birth. Why did he have to lower himself just to please a girl? Other than the throne, anything he wanted has always been presented to him or would be within his grasp.

Prince Zhou suddenly stopped and turned around. He stormed back to the couch. Under Fu Rou's gaze, he picked up the medicine bowl and drank a huge mouthful. Leaning over, he held Fu Rou down and placed his mouth over hers, forcing the medicine into hers.

Fu Rou could not free herself and had no choice but to swallow the medicine. When Prince Zhou let go of her, she slapped him before looking at her own hand in shock.

Prince Zhou's breathing became rushed as a fire burned in his eyes. "I rescued you from death's door not for you to sacrifice yourself out of love for Sheng Chumu. I am your benefactor, and your life is mine. If you still dare to refuse to take your medicine or take any food, I will personally feed you every meal!"

Fu Rou glared at Prince Zhou for a while before picking up the medicine bowl and finishing it in one breath.

"You are finally thinking clearly now?" Prince Zhou was mildly disappointed. If she had insisted on not drinking, it would be his fortune.

"Giving up on myself will bring no benefit to myself nor those around me. Chumu would also not wish to see me rot away." And she also did not want to be fed by Prince Zhou in this manner for every meal.

"He would want you to be happy and lift your head to look forward, finding another source of happiness." Prince Zhou did not forget to insert himself in Fu Rou's heart.

"I would like to ask Your Highness for another favour." *Unfortunately, her heart was already full.*

"You want to pray to Sheng Chumu." Prince Zhou stated blatantly. He knew her well. "They haven't found his body, so it is just a

cenotaph now.”

Fu Rou looked miserable. “It doesn’t matter. I just want to have a look, spend some time and say a few words to him.”

Prince Zhou grasped a jade pendant in his hand before finally saying one word. “Okay.”

He was not in a rush. This jade pendant will eventually be given to the one he loves.

The ocean in the night, a huge island and stars that shined. It was empty of the bustle of people.

Sheng Chumu looked coldly at the tight formation of the Four Seas Sect. He finally understood. Fang Ziyang was different from other pirates. He did not rob merchant boats but loved to attack other pirates. Sheng Chumu had not been with them for long but already saw seven or eight battles of varying sizes. What Suicide Nine, Tiger Bear Clan, Taisui Sect. The more intriguing their names were, the faster they died.

However, today’s Light Dragon Clan was slightly tricky. Because Fang Ziyang had gone on a fighting spree, several pirates had joined them.

“Evil eating evil, be careful not to choke.” Sheng Chumu snorted.

Fang Ziyang opened a wine sack and drank a mouthful. Unexpectedly, he threw the wine sack to Sheng Chumu, intending to share it with him.

Sheng Chumu did not stand on courtesy as he drank heartily. However, his face changed as the wine went down his throat. “They even dare to steal tribute wine?”

Fang Ziyang shrugged. “Give it back to me if you don’t want it.”

“Dream on!” The alcoholic side of him was awakened. It was only when the wine sack was empty, did he throw it back to Fang Ziyang.

“Fang Ziyan, since you are still alive, help me send a letter to Chang’an.” He guessed that Lu Yunji must have killed the messengers that he sent back to shut them up. After consuming the wine, his boldness knew no boundaries.

“Why don’t you just ask me to let you go free?” *Did he think he was a messenger?*

“I don’t believe that pirates are so nice. I am General Dingyuan from Great Tang. It doesn’t matter what is your motive for rescuing me but let me tell you. I, Sheng Chumu, will not be associated with you.”

In the beginning, when Fu Rou rejected Fang Ziyan, she also mentioned that she did not want to be associated with him. Now that Sheng Chumu was bringing it up once more, Fang Ziyan could not stand it anymore.

“I wasn’t born a pirate. I also had a warm and kind mother. Although her embroidery was average, she was an excellent cook. I love to eat the red braised pork my mother made the most. My father was the deputy of the county and was always conscientious in everything he did. He never took advantage of the people. His only hobby, similar to my grandfather and great-grandfather, was to rear eagles. My father loved keeping eagles and was very good at it. He has a king eagle that everyone would praise for its personality whenever they saw it. I always thought that my father loved his king eagle more than he loved me and was jealous of it.” He was actually speaking about his hidden past to someone he was not very close to; not to mention, the man had stolen his fiancée.

“It sounds like you were the child of an official, so how did you end up as a pirate?” Sheng Chumu was curious.

“Because of the king eagle.” Fang Ziyan narrowed his eyes. “There was an extremely powerful person that got his eye on my father’s king eagle and wanted my father to give it to him. My father refused to do so. After that, my father was set up and locked into prison. My mother fell into depression and eventually passed away because of an illness. In order to hide what they had done and remove all weeds, those people started to chase after me. I escaped to the river but was shot in the chest by their arrow and fell into the river. Eventually, I

was rescued by the old leader of the Four Seas Sect. He became my godfather.”

“You are very similar to me and almost lost your life because of an arrow. I was chased until I had nowhere to run and could only jump into the ocean.” Sheng Chumu was sympathetic. He suddenly shook his head. “Eh, to fall into the trap of sympathizing with my enemies. I almost fell for it. You definitely don’t have good intentions for rescuing me.”

Fang Ziyang asked, “Who is chasing after you?”

Sheng Chumu looked at Fang Ziyang seriously. “Okay fine, I will tell you the truth. On the surface, it looks like the rebel troops are after me, But the truth is the despicable people from the Lu family are using them to get rid of me.”

Fang Ziyang suddenly turned serious. “The person who forced my father to give up the king eagle and tore my whole family apart also had the surname Lu. He is a Great General in the Great Tang.”

Sheng Chumu and Fang Ziyang stared at each other before shouting simultaneously, “Lu Yunji!”

Filled with vengeance towards the same enemy, Sheng Chumu put his arm around Fang Ziyang. “On account of our similar hardship, let me sell a secret tactic to you.”

Fang Ziyang shrugged but could not get rid of Sheng Chumu’s claws. “Just say what you want to say.”

“When fighting against the Light Dragon Clan, burn their boats first before surrounding their island. You don’t have to attack them. They will fight among themselves for food and boats. You just have to wait and reap the benefits of their internal struggles.” Sheng Chumu had formed a strategy in his heart.

Fang Ziyang looked at Sheng Chumu. He could not bring himself to praise Sheng Chumu but his eyes were filled with admiration. He called for Ma Haihu and instructed him to do as Sheng Chumu suggested. Very soon, a black cloud appeared over the ocean.

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The Light Dragon Clan was in chaos and the Four Seas Sect got rid of the last poisonous weed in the seas. The moment Fang Ziyang returned to the ship, he looked for Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu sat down pompously. "So now you are willing to discuss with me?"

Fang Ziyang was quite impressed with him. "Since you are so smart, you should be able to guess what I am planning."

Sheng Chumu laughed, "At the beginning, I thought you wanted to become the king of the seas. However, I don't think that is the case anymore. You are trying to accumulate merits to return to the court. The reason why you did not kill me is because you need a high ranking official to back you up."

Fang Ziyang asked, "Are you going to help me?"

Instead of replying, Sheng Chumu questioned, "Are you going to let me go?"

Without any hesitation, Fang Ziyang answered, "As long as you are willing to help me, I can let you go immediately."

Sheng Chumu only reached out his hand and demanded, "Hand it over."

Fang Ziyang knew what Sheng Chumu was referring to and he knew

that he had been seen through as well. Yet, his pride meant that he refused to hand it over to Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu continued to stare at him with his hands out.

The two glared at each other intensely for a long time but Fang Ziyang eventually gave in as he was requesting his help. Digging through his pockets for a while, he finally took out a small thing and placed it in Sheng Chumu's hand.

It was the spice bag that Fu Rou had given Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu put the item away. "If you do not want to remain a pirate, you should get rid of your habit of stealing things from others. I am the one Rou'er likes and that spice bag was made for me. Keeping it with you would only make you a dirty thief."

Fang Ziyang changed the topic. "Go back to your room and tidy it up. I will get men to prepare a boat for you. Hurry up before I change my mind. With your terrible mouth, the more you talk, the more I want to throw you into the sea." *Sheng Chumu better not think that he was giving up on Fu Rou. He didn't get a spice pouch but he still had their betrothal gift, the Pendant of Longevity.*

Sheng Chumu turned and rushed back into one of the rooms in the ship. Unfortunately, he randomly entered a room and found Ma Hainiu in the midst of changing clothes. She screamed at him and Sheng Chumu brought a hand up to cover his eyes. Turning around, he bumped into Ma Haihu, who had dashed over upon hearing his sister's scream.

"What is wrong?" Ma Haihu stared at the situation in confusion.

"Brother, he saw me changing!"

Ma Hainiu's voice strangely appeared excited to Sheng Chumu.

In the blink of an eye, Ma Haihu tugged Sheng Chumu's shirt and pulled him back. He cursed, "You asshole, how dare you peep at my sister changing!"

Sheng Chumu desperately tried to explain. “I was in a rush to return something to my room and I accidentally opened the wrong door. Every room door on this ship looks exactly the same!”

Ma Haihu glared at him. “What are you shouting for? Are you guilty? Did you see my sister’s body?”

Ma Hainiu carried a gleam of hope in her eyes. “Are you satisfied?”

Sheng Chumu felt coldness and hotness surrounding his body at the same time. Gritting his teeth, he shouted, “I did not see anything!”

Disappointment overridden Ma Hainiu. “What? You did not see anything? How can that be? I will let you take another look.” Ma Hainiu suddenly took her hand off her chest.

Sheng Chumu quickly shut his eyes tight and traced the walls of the room with his hand to guide himself out. *My god! I never want to return to this ship! They are a bunch of unruly barbarians!*

Lu Yunji returned back victorious, having stabilised the region and getting rid of the rebel troops in Anxi Canyon. The Emperor personally went to greet him as the citizens cheered for him. No one knew that the contributions and sacrifices of Sheng Chumu and his numerous troops had been claimed by the Lu father and son.

A deathly aura overwhelmed the Duke Lu Residence. Sheng Xiaojing had not recovered from his grief and remained sick in bed. Lu Yunji visited him and pretended to be concerned. Not only was it a show for the Emperor, it was also to boast. As soon as Sheng Chujun heard that their enemies were here to visit them, he immediately drew his sword, wanting to fight them. All of a sudden, he heard his mother shout-

“Stop right there! Since Lu Yunji dares to visit us, we cannot lose to him. We must show everyone that despite losing a son, we have not gone crazy!” Madam Sheng roared at the housekeeper, “Go and invite Duke Chen [1] in!”

Sheng Chujun froze as he looked back at his mother in shock.

Sheng Chuling was also in a slight daze. He knew that his mother was very strict when it came to managing internal house affairs. She controlled their father till he was like a tortoise. However, he did not know that she had such strict standards for others too. She had the demeanor of a man on guard.

Lu Yunji was getting impatient as the door of Duke Lu Residence opened. Two servants ran out in sync. The servants both held long sticks in their hands as they stared at the two of them, daggers piercing out of their eyes. Although Lu Yunji knew they would not dare to do anything to him, their glare made him regret coming.

However, when Lu Yunji saw Sheng Xiaojing, who was sick in bed, his spirits were raised. While he sighed, he felt full of energy internally.

“Chumu is too pitiful. He was so young and brave. He conquered the Nine Pillar City and made a great achievement. It would have been sufficient for him to just stay in camp. It was unfortunate that he was ambitious and wanted to take down Anxi Canyon. Anxi Canyon had a difficult terrain and was known as the Death Canyon by people. The rebel army had several hideouts there. He did not listen to my advice and was determined to check out Anxi Canyon. He took several men with him and never returned.”

“Duke Chen, that's not possible. Who doesn't know that a general's command is law in the army? Without your order, Elder Brother has no reason to risk going against martial law to scout.” Sheng Chuling caught hold of the gap.

Lu Qi glared. “Sheng Chuling, what do you mean by that?”

“Elder Brother is an Assistant General. The only person that could order him go to the Anxi Canyon is the Main General.” They better not think he, Sheng Chuling, was stupid.

“Are you trying to say that my father intentionally killed your Elder Brother?” Lu Qi slammed the table and stood up.

“Lu Qi, that is enough.” Lu Yunji let out a long sigh. “Duke Lu, I feel guilty for not being able to bring Sheng Chumu back to Chang'an

unharméd.”

Sheng Xiaojing lacked energy. “Duke Chen, you don’t have to feel guilty. People die in war. As the main general, you are in charge of so many people. If you are to ensure everyone returns alive, there is no point in going to war.”

Lu Yunji took over. “Duke Lu, you are as reasonable as before and understand the difficulties of being the main general.”

“We are both fathers and should be reasonable. I finally have a taste of losing my son. It really hurts to live. Young General Lu is brilliant in martial arts and has potential. I hope that he will remain safe and that you won’t ever end up in my position.”

Sheng Xiaojing was grieving, how could he not feel hatred?

Sheng Chujun’s eyes burned. “The fate between the Sheng family and Lu family is deep and we might meet during the hunt. We can exchange greetings then. Lu Qi, you should be careful. There are bears and tigers in the hunting ground. Last year, a wild animal attacked someone and even chewed off his head.”

Lu Qi could not help remarking, “You’re the one who should be careful. Your brother lies in a cenotaph. If you are eaten by a tiger and your body cannot be found, you will need another cenotaph.”

Lu Yunji and Sheng Xiaojing looked at each other, letting their sons bicker. They were fighting each other internally.

Meanwhile, Fu Rou headed towards Lizheng Palace. Empress Zhangsun had ordered her to prepare the best embroideries for Lu Yunji’s daughter, Lu Yingying. She really could not bring herself to hate Lu Yingying. Lu Yingying was not evil but had simply been born into a despicable family.

“Head Seamstress Fu.”

Fu Rou turned back to look. She saw Shuangxi taking a walk with Sun Lingshu. They both had light expressions. Her gaze fell to Sun

Lingshu's usually flat stomach. She saw how Sun Lingshu placed her hand there and how Shuangxi had a slightly bent over position. The biggest news in the palace was that the Crown Princess was pregnant.

Fu Rou greeted, "Your Highness." It was obvious Sun Lingshu was in a good mood, she even took the initiative to talk to Fu Rou.

Sun Lingshu smiled lightly. "I was in a bad mood previously and I was always at odds with you. I should not have done that."

Fu Rou maintained a calm expression. "Crown Princess, please do not say that. It is my responsibility to serve you. If there is anything you are unhappy about, please point it out to me so that I can correct my ways."

A kind expression returned to Sun Lingshu's face, reminiscent of her times at Han Mansion. "I don't have many friends in the palace. You are the first friend I met before entering the palace. If I do anything wrong, I hope you will not blame me. It would be good if we remain on good terms in the future."

"Yes, it is definitely good for us to be on good terms." *Friends? She could not afford to be friends with her.*

"You seem to be very down. Is there something bothering you?"

Sun Lingshu's tone was slightly inquisitive as she recalled how Prince Zhou had helped Fu Rou out previously. Prince Zhou was the Crown Prince's biggest threat and therefore hers. If there was something going on between Fu Rou and Prince Zhou, perhaps she could make use of Fu Rou.

Fu Rou did not want to divulge her personal matters with strangers. She replied, "No."

"Head Seamstress Fu, you still don't see me as a friend." She casually glanced at the embroidery Fu Rou held. "I heard that Imperial Mother invited Lu Yingying to the palace. Is this for her?"

Fu Rou nodded in confirmation.

“Duke Chen repeatedly attained many merits for Great Tang. Imperial Father regards him in greater light. The Crown Prince told me that Imperial Father has ordered men to start constructing Lingyan Palace. He wants to put the portraits of the twenty-four heroes of Great Tang in that palace. Duke Chen will be one of them. This will be such an honor for him.” Sun Lingshu’s tone suddenly changed. “Imperial Mother also looks upon Lu Yingying highly and intends to marry her as one of the Crown Prince’s concubines. The Lu family’s future is limitless.” She smiled and slowly took her leave.

1. his title, irreverent to his name. In the drama, they changed it to Duke Cai.

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Fu Rou stared at Sun Lingshu's back view. She could sense the sourness from Sun Lingshu when she talked about Lu Yingying. Although spring had arrived, Sun Lingshu was still lost and suspicious of others. It would be very unlikely of her to change.

Unexpectedly, as Fu Rou reached Lizheng Palace, Empress Zhangsun wanted to change her embroidery to Lu Yingying to a drawing of lotuses and lilies. Fu Rou knew that the Crown Princess spoke the truth, there was a high chance of Lu Yingying becoming the Crown Prince's concubine.

Empress Zhangsun even praised Lu Yingying's calligraphy and took it out for Fu Rou to see.

Fu Rou bit her lip and a surge of hatred overwhelmed her as she looked at the calligraphy. Chumu's death, his missing body, Duke Lu's sickness and Consort Han's absence at the banquet. The Sheng family was going through tough times now. On the other hand, the Lu family's daughter, who did nothing to earn her position, was now favored in the palace and held the hopes of bearing Imperial grandchildren. Regardless of how kind-hearted she was, Fu Rou could not bear this unjust treatment.

She lifted her gaze and calmly said, "The saying goes that calligraphy reflects the writer. I believe that Lady Lu is a dignified and elegant

lady who will be a good wife.”

Empress Zhangsun happily added, “You think that way too?”

“I have seen Lady Lu at the Han Mansion before. She is beautiful, elegant and has a sweet smile. Her words, ‘The swallow flies across the pond, leaving a trail of its elegant feathers. The offspring returns from the far wild.’ This saying makes me think of someone else.” The good thing about reading books for Prince Zhou was that she gained a lot of knowledge along the way as well.

Empress Zhangsun curiously asked, “Oh? Who are you thinking of?”

“Zhuang Jiang.” Lu Yingying could only blame herself for writing these words. “‘The Swallow Flies’ is written by Princess Zhuang Jiang of the Qi State during the Spring and Autumn period. It was highly regarded by people and is written in the < <Book of Poems> >. She is also very pretty. The words about beauty in the poem were originally used to describe herself.”

Empress Zhangsun nodded. “Lu Yingying is also very pretty. They are similar.”

“However, no one can be perfect. God gave her beauty and talents but forgot one thing.” Fu Rou looked down. “Zhuang Jiang was married to Lord Wei but was unable to give birth to a child. Lord Wei had no choice but to marry Dai Gui who gave birth to a son for him. Zhuang Jiang saw the child as one of her own. However, not long after the child gained an official title of a Duke, he was killed. Zhuang Jiang was unlucky throughout her life and she spent her days gloomily.”

Empress Zhangsun’s expression darkened, and she recalled the saying ‘Heaven is jealous of beauties’.

“Head Seamstress Fu, you may leave.”

Fu Rou bowed towards the Empress and took her leave. However, as she was about to step out of the door, she heard Empress Zhangsun’s instruction to her internal attendant.

“Zhuang Jiang was too beautiful and she received heaven’s wrath.

The calamity that befell Wei State eventually might have something to do with her. Fate may not be kind to those who are good looking. Anyone who has a cursed fate would bring the Crown Prince bad luck. The Eastern Palace will welcome new people, you don't have to present Lu Yunji's daughter's picture anymore."

Fu Rou remained expressionless as she slowly walked out of the palace. She did not feel ashamed because Lu Yunji and Lu Qi were despicable people. Too many people had gotten hurt. As the daughter of the Lu family, she could not escape everything.

However, the small revenge did not bring Fu Rou any happiness. On the contrary, she was filled with sadness as she walked through the corridor. She subconsciously walked until she was lost. Sheng Chumu was gone. Not only did she not get to see him again, she could not even send him off. She was locked in this icy palace. Initially she was focused on getting out of the palace, now everything had lost meaning.

All of a sudden, a silhouette appeared at the end of the walkway.

The glare of the light was dazzling as his back was facing her. His steps were smooth as he stood upright. He had a unique confidence and ease about him that caught Fu Rou's attention. Fu Rou stopped in her tracks as she stared unblinkingly.

Why does he look so similar to the person that she had been missing to death? Is this her imagination or a miracle?

That person turned around to look in her direction. He suddenly hit his own chest as he jumped off the ground and did half a turn in the air. He then pointed to the main hall, indicating that he had to go and see the Emperor first. He waved at her and took big strides.

Fu Rou could hear her heart pounding as light flared in her eyes from the tears that had accumulated. *It's Sheng Chumu! He's alive! He has returned!*

Fu Rou shed tears of joy.

Sheng Chumu wasn't dead. He was perfectly alive. Not only has he

returned to Chang'an safely, he was going to report the Lu family's father and son. The Emperor was furious as he threw Lu Yunji and Lu Qi into the Imperial Prison. At that time, the Lu father and son pair were enjoying themselves at a banquet when they received the Imperial Order. No one knew what caused the sudden change of events as they were forced to bring their celebrations into prison.

There was no doubt that Duke Lu Residence was in a celebratory mood. Everyone in the palace was discussing this and made Sheng Chumu seem like a God. Witty Yang Bo even ran to Fu Rou and congratulated her. "Congratulations, Head Seamstress Fu."

Fu Rou slightly chastised him, "You are being playful again. What is there to congratulate me about?"

Yang Bo suddenly deepened his tone. "What do you have to hide from me? The last time you asked Chief Cao for help, who brought you before the palace gates to meet your man? I saw clearly that you passed him a spice pouch."

Fu Rou smiled, "You are sharp."

Yang Bo replied, "I am genuinely happy for you. I was really afraid that you would not make it after being severely ill. Not only are you better now, your man has returned from death's door. This is truly a return from adversity."

Yet, Fu Rou was not overly ecstatic. "What death's door? Don't say such cursed words."

Yang Bo could tell that Fu Rou was scarred from the incident. He hit his own lips and said, "Alright, alright. I won't say it anymore. I will go off now."

"Hold on." Fu Rou pulled out a handkerchief from under her sleeve. A pair of earrings were wrapped in the handkerchief. "Didn't you say that your parents passed on early on and your sister-in-law brought you up? I have a pair of emerald earrings here that Concubine Xi gave me. Take it and give it to your sister-in-law."

Yang Bo retracted his hand from Fu Rou. "How can I take this from

you?”

“Keep it. Emerald is rare. On the fifteenth of the next month, we are allowed to visit our families by the Empress’ grace. Give this to your sister-in-law and let her be happy.” There were only a few people in the palace who treated her genuinely. Fu Rou would not forget their kindness.

“Thank you very much then.” Yang Bo took the earrings and skipped off joyfully.

Fu Rou’s footsteps were light as she walked through the corridor and past the Imperial Garden. She did not shift her gaze as she continued onwards.

“Head Seamstress Fu.” A familiar voice entered her ears. Fu Rou froze before turning around. She then realised that Prince Zhou was sitting at the pavilion that she had just passed.

“Why? Do I not even have a shadow in your eyes anymore? You pretend not to see me when you do. You don’t even greet me anymore.” Prince Zhou’s face darkened as he caught sight of Fu Rou’s surprised face.

“I wouldn’t dare. I really did not see Your Highness.” *If she had seen him, she would have hidden long ago.*

“Sheng Chumu has returned.” Prince Zhou’s tone was pensive.

“Mmhm, he has returned.” Fu Rou found it hard to hide her smile.

“Why did he come back?” Prince Zhou felt like it was a thorn in his side.

“What do you mean, Your Highness? Should he not return?” Fu Rou turned into a mother hen protecting her chick once again.

“There are many that do not wish for him to return.” *This included him.*

“If Your Highness does not have anything else, I will take my leave.” Fu Rou did not want to continue talking.

Prince Zhou instructed, “On the ninth, come to Lingxiao Palace.”

“I already said...” *That I would not go.*

“You can choose not to come.” Prince Zhou looked at her. “But if you don’t, I will ask Sheng Chumu to call you over and I will tell him that I kissed you before.”

Fu Rou suddenly lifted her gaze and stared right into Prince Zhou’s eyes. *Is he threatening her?*

“On the ninth, Lingxiao Palace. I will be waiting for you.”

Prince Zhou tutted before glancing briefly at Fu Rou and turning to leave. *Did she think he was going to be a mature adult? Dream on! The only people that could make him back off was his Imperial Father and his mother. He could give up on other things, but not the person he loved!*

Court Lady

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Lu Yingying sat in the garden as she stared blankly at the plants around her.

In her memory, it seemed like ever since she came to Chang'an, she never had the time to just look at her own garden. Because she was Lu Yunji's daughter, she received numerous invitations from other families. She would meet one duke today, another lord the next day. Following her father's wishes, she associated herself with the noble ladies of Chang'an and was always busy.

Over time, she started to get irritated; especially after her father and brother returned. There were so many banquets, so she always had to rush around. She was so tired and asked her father to allow her to rest for a few days. Who would have known that things would change so quickly?

With her father and brother in prison, her cousin, Hanxing, had gathered all the valuables in their house to exchange for money. Her invitations disappeared along with the valuables in her house. To be honest, she did not care. She also did not care about the rumours of her father and brother bullying citizens and robbing them for their personal gain. Everyone in their residence was shaken and the servants were in no mood to work. Weeds grew in the garden, yet no one removed them. She still did not care.

All she knew was that her mother had passed on after giving birth to her and it was her brother that carried her to look for their aunt, saving her life. She also knew that her father doted on her and allowed her to do whatever she wanted in order to reduce the gap left by her missing mother. To others, Lu Yunji and Lu Qi might be nasty. However, to her, they were the best father and brother in the world. She was willing to give up her image for them.

Hence, Lu Yingying no longer sat in a daze. She walked into her father's study room. The study room was empty, with all the valuable antiques sold. All of a sudden, her gaze landed on her father's armor beside the screen. She remembered every tear and stitch that mended it. She also remembered the droplets of the enemies' and her father's blood. If she remembered all this, then the Emperor would as well.

Lu Yingying knew what she had to do.

The next morning, Lu Yingying put on the armor and appeared in the palace. She was going to beg the Emperor to spare her father and brother on account of their contributions throughout the years.

However, the Emperor had just locked Lu Hanxing up as well for bribing other officials to plead for Lu Yunji. He was in the worst mood and rejected Lu Yingying. Lu Yingying knelt in front of the palace for an entire day and into the night.

Her determination was recognized by quite a few people as her being filial.

When Sun Lingshu heard this, she was fuming. Ever since they were competitors for the position of Crown Princess, she had subconsciously been comparing herself to Lu Yingying. Lu Yingying looked innocent and carefree, receiving the love of many. Moreover, she still hasn't forgotten the way the Crown Prince looked at Lu Yingying. Although the Empress had already given up on the idea of getting Lu Yingying to be the Crown Prince's concubine, Lu Yingying may be playing tricks.

Hence, Sun Lingshu went to check out the situation. However, when

she saw the Crown Prince speak to Lu Yingying with a look of concern in his eyes, she could not help but feel uneasy.

She was feeling down when she went to greet Empress Zhangsun. Unexpectedly, the Empress did not show much concern but merely told her to be more magnanimous as the main wife. If she was not able to attend to the Crown Prince well, she should make arrangements. Other than the day that Sun Lingshu told her the joyous news of being pregnant and the Empress showed her concern, the Empress did not care much about her thereafter. Not only that, Empress Zhangsun even asked her to think from the Crown Prince perspective and find other ladies for the Crown Prince.

At this moment, Fu Rou entered.

Empress Zhangsun asked, “Head Seamstress Fu, did you hear about Lu Yingying kneeling in front of the palace?”

“Yes I heard she kneeled for an entire day and night.” Although Fu Rou could not bring herself to like Lu Yingying, she could not hate her as well. Putting her feelings aside, they were both females and she admired Lu Yingying’s filial piety.

Sun Lingshu could not stand it any longer. “Imperial Mother, how can you allow her to kneel in front of the palace? She is the daughter of a criminal. What she is doing is clearly making things difficult for Imperial Father.” She accidentally let her jealousy show in her voice.

Empress Zhangsun stared deeply at Sun Lingshu.

Sun Lingshu felt uneasy. “Have I said something wrong?”

Empress Zhangsun replied, “No. However, as people from the harem, we should not interfere with court matters. Even if someone asks us, there is no need to answer. Remember this. Anyhow, you are pregnant and shouldn’t tire yourself. Return back to your palace to rest.”

Sun Lingshu anxiously excused herself and left.

“This daughter-in-law of mine-” Empress Zhangsun stopped what she was saying and waved at Fu Rou, indicating for her to leave.

No matter what, Lu Yingying was kneeling for her father. It was a moving act of filial piety. However, Sun Lingshu looked at her as if she was a thorn by her side and wanted to punish her harshly for selfish reasons. She had no consideration for human relationships and was extremely narrow-minded. In reality, Empress Zhangsun was extremely disappointed in Sun Lingshu.

Fu Rou left Lizheng Palace and headed to the Seamstress Department. As she walked, she wondered if Empress Zhangsun had seen through Sun Lingshu's intentions. In her opinion, ever since Sun Lingshu became the Crown Princess, she had always been on guard when facing others and accumulated resentment. Hence, she resorted to underhanded means to get her revenge. On the other hand, Lu Yingying did not care what others thought of her and did not even bother looking for the culprit after getting water thrown on her. She was not ashamed of kneeling for her father and brother and was able to judge right from wrong. Her sincerity could be felt.

The palace was like a maze, the more people walked astray, the more they got lost. One would only be able to escape if they persevered with their original intentions.

Fu Rou suddenly halted and turned to find Yang Bo.

The midday sun shone down on Lu Yingying. Although it was not very glaring, after kneeling for an entire day without food or water, along with fifty kilograms of metal armor, one would lose strength very quickly.

All of a sudden, a dark shadow blocked out the piercing sun. Lu Yingying took a deep breath and looked up to see an internal attendant smiling warmly at her.

"Have a sip of water." The internal attendant sneakily took out a small water flask, the size of a palm, and helped her to open it.

From that angle, no one could see that the internal attendant was giving her water nor would anyone see Lu Yingying drinking. Lu Yingying shook her head.

The internal attendant whispered, "If you continue like this, you might not even be able to last long enough for the Emperor to change his mind. When that time comes, who else is going to save Duke Chen?"

Lu Yingying froze before extending her hand out to take the water flask. She did not expect to be so thirsty as she finished it in a single gulp.

She handed the flask back in embarrassment. "Thank you. What is your name?"

The internal attendant smiled before jutting his chin out in a particular direction. "You don't have to thank me. Someone asked me to do it."

Lu Yingying looked over and saw a slender figure. "Who?"

However, the internal attendant had already left. Lu Yingying wanted to call him to stop when two attendants appeared from the other side. One of them said, "Lu Yingying, His Majesty is ready to see you. Come with us quickly."

Lu Yingying was delighted and got up too quickly, almost falling as a result. Luckily, the other attendant supported her. She then staggered in the direction of Ganlou Palace.

Yang Bo, who had delivered water to Lu Yingying, ran to the small door. Fu Rou was standing by it.

"Head Seamstress Fu, do you have some kind of relationship with her?"

"We met several times but do not really have a relationship. Moreover, I hate her father but admire her." Fu Rou smiled. "Thank you for your help, Yang Bo."

Yang Bo looked at Lu Yingying as she was led into the palace. "The Emperor is finally willing to see her. Head Seamstress Fu, your sip of water has brought her great fortune."

"No, her filial piety has moved him."

After being led into Ganlou Palace, Lu Yingying kneeled on the ground. "Greetings, Your Majesty. I am the daughter from the Lu family. Long live Your Majesty."

The Emperor's expression was unreadable. "Someone asked me if they should remove the picture of your father among the < <Twenty-four Officials> > in Lingyan Palace. I remember when Yunji was young, he was already famous for his martial art skills and bravery. In the earlier days of the Sui Dynasty, the empire was in chaos. He fought with me to conquer the east and west, achieving numerous outstanding feats. Back then, Li Yuanji, the King of Qi, tried numerous times to assassinate me. If not for Yunji, I wouldn't be here today."

Lu Yingying bowed even lower, not daring to look up. "Thank you, Your Majesty, for considering the former days."

"However, your father has been acting out his own selfish desire, he plunders cities and robs them, killing the innocent. That is why he is being punished today." The Emperor continued in a low voice, "It is not something that can simply be resolved with you, a girl, wearing the armor and begging for mercy."

"This armor is the one that Father always brings back from the battlefield. There are scars all over the armor and even holes that were created from being pierced through in some areas. These holes were then mended on the request of my father, using metal threads." Lu Yingying placed her palms on the ground and struggled to raise her head.

"Are you trying to help your father show off his contributions?" The Emperor was unhappy.

"Yingying wouldn't dare. I have read Saint Mengzi's book. Mengzi said that humans are different from beasts because humans have four hearts; the heart to despise evil, the heart to yield, the heart to judge between wrong and right..."

The Emperor finished her sentence. "And the heart for compassion."

“Even the common people have compassion, what more the mighty ruler? There is no way to repay my debt to my father for raising me. Although I am just a girl, I am begging Your Majesty to have mercy and let me die in place of my father.” Lu Yingying once again bowed to the floor.

The Emperor fell silent for a long while. “People must have compassion. Although Yunji has committed a crime, he has accompanied me for so many years. Your devotion to your father is also moving and makes me hesitate to kill him. Convey my order, release Lu Yunji and Lu Qi from the prison. I will not reward him for his achievements, but I will also not kill him for his crime of plundering cities.”

Lu Yingying shed tears of joy. She thanked the Emperor but remained on the ground for a long while.

The Emperor found it weird and ordered an internal attendant to check. It turned out that Lu Yingying had fainted. The Emperor felt that her courage was admirable and purposely requested for her to be sent home using the Imperial Sedan. He even sent the best Imperial Physicians after her.

When the news spread, Lu Yingying had turned into the most sought after daughter-in-law in Chang'an.

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Fu Rou hugged a bundle to her body as she rushed along. She frequently glanced behind, afraid that someone would see her. However, whatever she was afraid of would come. As soon as she turned the corner, she bumped into Prince Zhou.

“Today is the ninth of the month. Head Seamstress Fu, I hope you haven’t forgotten.” He was calm and composed as if he knew that he would meet her.

“I...” *I completely forgot.* Fu Rou hugged the bundle tighter towards her as she kept her elbows tucked in. “I am heading to Princess Xinnan to deliver embroideries.”

Prince Zhou raised his eyebrows. “Delivering embroideries is nothing urgent. I will send someone to deliver it to Princess Xinnan for you. Come with me now.” He grabbed onto Fu Rou’s wrist and pulled her.

Fu Rou could not escape from his grasp. It was only when they reached Lingxiao Palace did Prince Zhou release her hand.

Fu Rou was unhappy. “Your Highness, what do you have for me that is so urgent?”

Prince Zhou could tell that Fu Rou was extremely anxious about the bundle in her arms. “What is inside the bundle?”

Fu Rou froze. “Embroideries...for Princess Xinnan.”

“Open it for me to see.” Prince Zhou did not believe her.

“What’s so nice to see about embroideries?” However, under Prince Zhou’s insistent gaze, she had no choice but to reluctantly open it.

Pouch, spice bag, clothes, etc. Each were made with intricate and outstanding embroidery.

“You made all these by yourself?” Even he could not help but exclaim.

“Yes, Princess Xinnan likes my work.” Fu Rou did not blink as she lied.

“I like it too.” Prince Zhou was unwilling to let her go, he flipped through them gently. “Why is there only one red flower on them?”

“Your Highness does not like monotone designs but there is someone that likes it.”

Everything in the bundle was made for Sheng Chumu. Ever since Sheng Chumu returned to Chang’an, she had spent every day working on these. It was only after she almost lost him did she realise that he was more important than anything else. In the past, when he asked her for embroideries, she was always reserved and refused to give more. Now, he didn’t need to ask her.

Prince Zhou found it strange. His eyes suddenly flashed. “Huh? Why are there men’s clothes?”

“Maybe Her Highness wants to give it to someone? Her Highness did not say, and I did not ask.” Fu Rou had already prepared herself for his question.

Prince Zhou’s eyes narrowed slightly. “Is this really for Xinnan?”

“Yes.” She could not hesitate at all. The person in front of her knew how to read people.

“Okay, I want this set of clothes.” Prince Zhou picked it out. Fu Rou

blurted, "It's not for you."

"Today is my birthday." *If not, why would he demand that she met him today.* "Is it too much to ask for me to have a set of clothes you personally made for a birthday gift?"

"It is not too much, but this set..." *This set does not belong to him.*

Prince Zhou, however, had already worn the clothes. He lowered his eyes and assessed himself. "It fits just right."

Fu Rou panicked. "For Your Highness' birthday, it is natural for you to ask the Seamstress Department to make you a new set of clothes. However, we have rules and cannot do as we please. When I get back, I will immediately make a set for you. However, Your Highness has to return this set to me."

"I have already worn it. If you want it back, you have to take it off yourself. Come on." Prince Zhou lifted his elbows calmly.

Fu Rou scolded him internally before packing her bundle and leaving. She could not be bothered to argue with him.

Prince Zhou lowered his head as he looked at his new clothes. Despite having forcibly taken it, he was satisfied.

Fu Rou was fuming as she walked around the lake. How could he do that? It wasn't his clothes but he forcibly took it. It was like his feelings towards her; it didn't matter if she wanted it or not, he was forcing it on her. Unfortunately, he was of a high status and she could not offend him.

Fu Rou was distracted by her thoughts. All of a sudden, a black figure jumped in front of her and caused her to shriek in fright.

"Sister-in-law." Luckily Sheng Chuling shouted in time.

"Sheng Chuling, if you don't stop scaring people, I will get Chumu to teach you a lesson!" Fu Rou patted her heart.

"I have been wronged. Since when did I want to scare you. I am..." Sheng Chuling felt wronged. He looked left and right, remaining alert. "Guards cannot interact with female officials. I am afraid that someone would see us, so I hid to wait for you."

Fu Rou knew this too and quickly handed the bundle over to Sheng Chuling. "Help me pass this to your Elder Brother."

Sheng Chuling did not stand on courtesy as he opened it up to have a look. "Two pouches, two spice bags, three fans. Wow, so many. Sister-in-law, you are too generous. If Elder Brother wears all of this, he would be extremely fragrant. If he adds the three fans to his belt, he will look even more imposing."

Fu Rou laughed, "You dare to make jokes about your brother and me. Be careful or I will hit you."

Sheng Chuling guffawed, "Sister-in-law, I am helping you deliver things, how can you bear to hit me..."

"Sheng Chuling!" Princess Xinnan's shout resounded from across the lake.

Fu Rou immediately turned around and rushed off.

Sheng Chuling ran around the lake to Princess Xinnan. "Princess, what a coincidence"

Ever since the Qinglou incident, with the help of the Peace Knot and kite, the relationship between the two have vastly improved.

Princess Xinnan pursed her lips slightly. "Who were you talking to?"

Sheng Chuling snickered, "Why? Are you jealous?"

"Are you going to tell me?" Princess Xinnan became suspicious.

"Actually, I was going to tell you. But with this attitude, hmph, I am not going to." Sheng Chuling thought to himself that he was not going to give in to her princess attitude.

"What are you holding in your hands?" It was hard not to notice the

huge bundle.

“It is not for you anyway.” *Why is her attitude still like this?* Sheng Chuling decided not to tell her.

Princess Xinnan reached out to snatch it from him. Sheng Chuling gripped it even tighter. In the midst of their fight, the bundle tore and the things in it fell out. Sheng Chuling bent over to pick it up. When he saw that the spice bag was covered in dust, he quickly tried to dust and blow it off. This made Princess Xinnan even angrier.

“You are not allowed to pick it up!” Princess Xinnan stomped.

“You are unreasonable. I already said it is not for you, but you purposely tried to snatch it. Now, you don’t allow me to pick it up?”

Princess Xinnan shouted, “That’s right, you are not allowed to! I am ordering you to throw all these disgusting things into the water now.”

“Ridiculous.” Sheng Chuling turned to walk away.

Princess Xinnan glared at Sheng Chuling’s retreating back, wanting him to look back. However, he very quickly disappeared from sight.

Princess Xinnan fumed as she asked Zhenzhu to call for guards nearby. She then asked the guards which palace maids had been around. The guards replied that there were no palace maids, just Head Seamstress Fu.

Princess Xinnan froze initially before recalling that Fu Rou was the one that brought the peace knot to her. *So Fu Rou acted like she was helping her on the surface but was actually seducing Sheng Chuling behind her back? Good! Very good! She wanted to see whether a female official would win over her, a princess!*

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The peony in Duke Lu Residence bloomed once again. Sheng Chumu sat on the steps in the front courtyard, laughing bitterly at the garden. He recalled when his father chased him to scold him and he escaped to Guangzhou, meeting Fu Rou there. A year had passed since then. Not only has he not returned with a beauty, the more time passed, the less he got to see her. Meeting her was as difficult as ascending to heaven.

“Elder Brother, I am back!” Sheng Chuling ran over with a huge bag in hand.

Sheng Chumu did not move as his eyes filled with resentment. *Who would have thought that Sheng Chuling would like Princess Xinnan. That brat was actually capable and went into the palace to become a guard. Although his position was low, he could enter the interior palaces easily and meet with the person he likes everyday. Tsk, if he had known this, he would have followed his brother to become a guard. What general? If he could stay by Fu Rou's side, he would do anything. However, climbing a mountain was easier than getting off. He could not simply tell the Emperor that he did not want to be a general and just wanted to be a guard.*

Seeing how Sheng Chumu had no reaction, Sheng Chuling's eyes flashed. He hugged the bag and laughed sinisterly, “Elder Brother, do you know what this is?”

Sheng Chumu looked at Sheng Chuling with jealousy in his eyes, his tone was bad, "Hurry and say what you want!"

"I had to take a huge risk to get this. I crossed mountains and oceans -" Sheng Chuling opened his mouth, "Sister-in-law gave this to you!"

When Sheng Chumu heard him, he immediately snatched the bundle over. He quickly opened it and his eyes lit up. He could tell that all these embroideries were made personally by Fu Rou! Rou'er knew that he really loved her work and he had to spend so much effort just to get them in the past. Now, she literally prepared embroideries for him to don on from head to toe. He could tell that Rou'er was also missing him from the palace.

Sheng Chumu started to laugh to himself as if he had found a treasure. He hugged the bag tightly to himself.

"Elder Brother, I quarreled with Princess Xinnan because of this." Sheng Chuling was tactless. "She bickered with me and even broke the bag, causing everything to fall onto the ground."

"What? You drop the things Fu Rou gave me on the ground?" Sheng Chumu could not be bothered with the process and only focused on the end result. Rou'er gave the things to you and now they are dirty. Who should I blame if I don't blame you? Go and squat now..." Sheng Chumu narrowed his eyes. "No! Do the horse stance for 4 hours!"

Sheng Chuling did not dare to disobey his elder brother and obediently went to the corner to do the horse stance.

Sheng Chumu picked up one embroidery after another as he examined the needlework. He laughed to himself in a silly manner.

"Do you miss me so much? So much that you don't even need to sleep? Haha, now you know how precious I am! You went to talk to me at my grave? Oh right, I haven't gone to my coffin yet, I wonder how many jewels it is covered in..."

The next morning, Sheng Chumu was filled with energy as he headed

to court. During the court meeting, Sheng Chumu brought up the matter of Fang Ziyan, the leader of Four Seas Sect, paying allegiance to the Emperor and requested for the Emperor to accept them.

“Your Majesty, you definitely cannot accept them.” Lu Yunji, who had just spent his days eating prison food, strongly opposed. Yet, he still had not learned his lesson and was bursting with energy from his release. “The Four Seas Sect is a group of pirates and their leader, Fang Ziyan, is a famous pirate in the South Seas. These people rob and burn ships. There is nothing that they haven’t done. They won’t be sincere in joining the empire.”

Sheng Chumu was unhappy with the Emperor’s decision to let Lu Yunji go so easily. Lu Yunji plundered and killed innocent citizens. If any of his crimes were to be on any other person, they would definitely have been beheaded. However, Lu Yunji’s crimes were simply offset by his achievements. Nonetheless, he still caused harm to others yet he did not seem to be repentant.

Sheng Chumu chuckled, “Duke Chen, why do you seem to hate the Four Seas Sect so much? Is there an unspeakable reason?” Lu Yunji refused to look at Sheng Chumu. “Your Majesty, I have a strong hatred towards all robbers.”

Sheng Chumu sneered, “Including those who use investigating rebel armies as a reason to rob the citizens of their valuables?”

The Emperor frowned. “Sheng Chumu, I have already released Duke Chen. Do not bring up matters of the past anymore.”

Only then did Lu Yunji throw Sheng Chumu a look and continue on, “Your Majesty, I am very familiar with the Guangdong region and the pirates in that area. Fang Ziyan from the Four Seas Sect is a brutal and malicious pirate. He robs all ships regardless of whether they are a merchant ship or an official ship. He has no respect for the law and does many evil deeds. It is damaging to the Great Tang’s reputation to let him live.”

“Duke Chen is so familiar with the Four Seas Sect. Is it because you have been robbed by them before? I wonder how much valuables you lost that caused you so much pain?” Sheng Chumu wanted to see Lu

Yunji's reaction.

"That's right, he even dares to rob my ship. Can you imagine how much suffering he brings to merchant ships?"

Sheng Chumu rebutted, "Fang Ziyan does not..."

The Emperor suddenly cut him off, "Sheng Chumu."

Sheng Chumu bowed. "Yes, Your Majesty."

"I bestowed the position of General Xuanwei and asked you to guard Xuanwu Gate. You should be loyal to me. However, now you are helping a pirate just because he saved your life and forgetting my kindness. Do you know the consequences of your actions?"

Sheng Xiaojing reached out to tug on Sheng Chumu's sleeve. He signaled to Sheng Chumu to back down and beg for mercy.

Sheng Chumu ignored him. "It is true that Fang Ziyan from the Four Seas Sect is my saviour. I will not hide this from Your Majesty. When I was sailing with them, I personally saw the Four Seas Sect wipe out the other pirates and bring peace to the oceans of Great Tang. This is a good thing for our Great Tang as well as all the merchant and official ships. If I am committing a crime just by saying what I think, then Your Majesty would be failing me, not that I am failing Your Majesty."

"Sheng Chumu, you are extremely bold. How dare you spout such insolent words in court!" Lu Yunji was delighted. Sheng Chumu was asking for trouble.

The Emperor, however, replied, "Duke Chen, step aside, let him continue. I want to hear what else he dares to say?"

Sheng Chumu was not afraid. "Back then when Confucius took in disciples, he took in different people. Gong Zhizhang was a criminal but Confucius accepted him and even let him marry his daughter.

Later on, Gong Zhizhang became one of the Seventy-two virtuous saints. He had integrity, talent and was well-respected. In the past, one of the Emperors spent a thousand taels to buy bones to let everyone know of his desire for the thousand-mile horse. Everyone

then presented thousand-mile horses to him. If Your Majesty forgives Fang Ziyan now and accepts his allegiance, everyone who has committed crimes will think of Your Majesty as magnanimous. They will then all come and pledge their allegiance to you. In this manner, Great Tang will have a lot less havoc and the citizens can do their business in peace. It is true that I owe Fang Ziyan my life. However, as I stand in court, I am Your Majesty's humble servant. I am not speaking for Fang Ziyan but for Great Tang."

The Emperor fell silent for a moment before speaking in a much lighter tone, "Sheng Chumu, this is the first time that I realise not only are you good at horse-riding and archery, you are articulate as well."

Sheng Chumu had no fear. "When your humble servant speaks, I am not counting on my talent to phrase words nicely but my sincere and loyal heart."

The Emperor laughed. "What a sincere and loyal heart."

"Your Majesty, when I parted ways with Fang Ziyan, he made me a promise that he will wipe out all the pirates on the ocean for Your Majesty. He has also requested for me to present another gift to Your Majesty." Sheng Chumu gave a meaningful glance.

The Emperor was interested. "What gift?"

"It is a beautiful mountain-river embroidery piece, personally made by Lady Hui. Lady Hui is famous for her embroideries. Her husband and father are both famous for their profound knowledge in astronomy and geography. They have been to many places and seen many things that others may not have even heard of. It is rumored that after her husband and father passed away, Lady Hui became depressed. She then sewed all the secrets that her husband and father left behind into this mountain-river embroidery to form a secret map. Several tragedies have happened when people tried to steal this embroidery. It is a pity that no one has ever been able to figure out the secret map behind this art. Fang Ziyan got this after he exterminated four other pirate groups. He specially asked me to present this to Your Majesty and wish that Great Tang will forever be as beautiful as this mountain-river embroidery." Sheng Chumu came

prepared.

Lu Yunji wanted to stop him. "Your Majesty..."

The Emperor gestured for Sheng Chumu to present the gift and he scrutinized the mountain-river embroidery. "I will have to think more about the allegiance of Four Seas Sect. We will end here. Court is dismissed."

Deep down, Sheng Chumu was fairly sure he had succeeded.

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Fu Rou had been summoned by the Empress. On her way to Lizheng Palace, she was distracted.

This morning, Fu Rou received the embroidery that Princess Xinnan had returned. It had been cut into pieces. Princess Xinnan sent word that the embroidery was too ugly and even targeted Fu Rou, asking her to redo it personally. Ever since Fu Rou took charge of the Seamstress Department, they had been producing embroideries quickly and of good quality. They received numerous compliments, It was the first time that they had received such a reaction and Fu Rou could not help but feel dejected.

Although Fu Rou had reassured her subordinates and the palace maids in the Seamstress Department, she was still concerned. However, she had nothing against Princess Xinnan, she was simply brooding over how to make the princess happy. After all, she checks every piece of embroidery before they are submitted and their quality was definitely up to standard.

Fu Rou was unaware that Princess Xinnan had misunderstood that she had something going on with Sheng Chuling and hence directed her anger onto the embroideries.

“Head Seamstress Fu.” A soft and gentle voice brought her back to reality. She realised that she had already reached Lizheng Palace.

Lu Yingying walked out of the palace and stopped beside her. "I know that you are the reason why the internal attendant brought me water. I will repay you tenfold of what you gave me in my time of need."

Fu Rou paused. "You don't have to think much into it. Actually, the Empress intended to choose you as a concubine to the Crown Prince. It was my words that caused the Empress to give up on the thought."

Lu Yingying was slightly taken aback before she laughed. "I rather be a chicken's head than a phoenix's tail. I should be the one thanking you for this." She then walked past her.

Fu Rou gazed at Lu Yingying's departing figure.

The Lu family had a good daughter. She then turned and walked into the main hall.

"Head Seamstress Fu, come over here. Let me show you something precious." Empress Zhangsun immediately beckoned Fu Rou over.

Fu Rou walked up and saw the thing that was displayed on the table. She momentarily could not shift her eyes away.

Empress Zhangsun said, "They say that this is a mountain-river embroidery by Lady Hui. I thought about how talented you are in embroidery and thought that you should see this."

Fu Rou looked at how detailed it was and expressed delight. "Your Majesty, this is indeed a piece by Lady Hui. I have a piece by Lady Hui that has been passed down my family for generations. I have always loved Lady Hui's embroidery and am familiar with her style of sewing. I can confirm that this is definitely done by Lady Hui."

"I knew I found the right person!" Empress Zhangsun exclaimed in happiness. Since you understand Lady Hui's embroidery, then look carefully and tell me if you can find the secret map?"

"Secret map?"

Empress Zhangsun said, "Many people said that the mountain-river embroidery is an artwork with a secret map. I have stared at it for

very long but cannot figure it out. Look at it, can you figure anything out?"

Fu Rou looked at it for a while before shaking her head. "If there really is a secret in it, I don't think it will be easy to figure out."

Empress Zhangsun nodded. "Head Seamstress Fu, you are the head of the Seamstress Department and anything that you manage anything related to embroideries. Since you said that you are familiar with Lady Hui's embroidery, I will hand this task over to you."

"I will try my best." Without a second thought, Fu Rou accepted. She was extremely excited.

At Lingxiao Palace's rooftop, Prince Zhou was reading while leaning on the rail. All of a sudden, a flying black dot in the corner caught his eye. He turned his head to look out of the window. A kite was hanging from the roof. He stood up to take it down and realised that there were words written on it.

"I only like red flowers with thorns—" Prince Zhou's expression became sharp as he thought of the flower that Fu Rou had embroidered in the bundle that she had carried previously. They were all red flowers with thorns.

It was obvious that since the person could not come in, he could only use the kite to relay his message.

"Guards." He called for the Imperial Guards. "Recently, there are always kites flying in with nonsense written on them. It is polluting the Royal Palace. Go and inform the other guards to patrol around the palace walls. See who is so bold as to do this."

With Prince Zhou's order, the Imperial Guards did not dare to delay the matter and immediately sent guards to check. From afar, the guards saw two suspicious shadows.

"Who! Who is that releasing the kites! You are disrupting the order of the Royal Palace!" The guards immediately gave chase.

Their target stumbled to keep the rest of the kites before running away. They escaped extremely quickly. It was only after they managed to get the guards off their tails did they finally stop to catch their breaths.

“Your idea is useless! It even attracted the attention of the Imperial Guards.” Sheng Chumu grumbled and complained.

“I didn’t know that things would turn out like this. When I did this for Xinnan, nothing happened.” Sheng Chuling was obviously the one who came up with the idea.

The two of them never would have thought that not only did the kite not reach their intended recipient and landed in Prince Zhou’s hands, it also reached another person – Princess Xinnan.

In the beginning, when Princess Xinnan saw the kites, she had thought that Sheng Chuling was seeking forgiveness. She happily went to chase one of them. However, as she saw another one, she asked Zhenzhu to pick it up. She then saw the words “I only like red flowers with thorns” and could not help but fume. She misunderstood and thought that Sheng Chuling was doing this on purpose to piss her off. It was also because of the kites that Zhenzhu got into trouble. When she was chasing the kites, she bumped into Grand Prince Liang and almost let him take liberties with her. Grand Prince Liang was the son of the Grand Emperor (previous Emperor) and was the current Emperor’s brother. He was incredibly lecherous and used his status to bully a lot of females.

Princess Xinnan was extremely furious and brought Zhenzhu to Lizheng Palace to complain to Empress Zhangsun. Princess Xinnan wanted Empress Zhangsun to be the judge and punish Grand Prince Liang. Before Empress Zhangsun could say anything, someone came from the Grand Emperor’s side. The retired Emperor instructed Zhenzhu to be sent over to Grand Prince Liang.

The Grand Emperor had always sided with his son and would agree to anything Grand Prince Liang wanted. This time, all he wanted was a palace lady and the Grand Emperor did not think it was a big deal.

Similarly, Empress Zhangsun did not think it was worth it to offend the Grand Emperor over a palace maid and immediately agreed to the Grand Emperor's request.

Zhenzhu had followed Princess Xinnan for many years. Princess Xinnan was indignant and ran to ask the Crown Prince for help.

"It is clearly Grand Prince Liang's fault but not only did Imperial Mother not punish him, she even ordered me to send Zhenzhu over to him. Zhenzhu has been serving me for so many years and even if she has no achievements, she has to be credited for her hard work. Grand Prince Liang teased her, and she resisted against him. She accidentally pushed Grand Prince Liang onto the ground. It was not on purpose."

"Don't talk about Imperial Mother, even Imperial Father has to respect him. Since the Grand Emperor has already spoken, this situation is final. Just listen to Imperial Mother and send Zhenzhu over." The Crown Prince had similar thoughts. After all, his Imperial Father owed the Grand Emperor.

Princess Xinnan was adamant. "No. Grand Prince Liang is cruel. Elder Brother, haven't you heard? Last month, Grand Prince Liang was contradicted, and he beat five palace maids to death. If Zhenzhu offends him, how can she live? Imperial Father dotes on you. Elder Brother, please help me please for mercy from Imperial Father. Beg Imperial Father for help and not send Zhenzhu to Grand Prince Liang."

The Crown Prince sighed, "Xinnan, you really don't understand Imperial Father. Imperial Father wishes for the entire world to see him as a filial son to the Grand Emperor. He will definitely not risk making the Grand Emperor angry over such a small matter."

Princess Xinnan cried, "So, I can only just watch as Zhenzhu gets abused by Grand Prince Liang?"

"I heard that the Grand Emperor loves collecting unique stones." The Crown Prince retrieved a stone from his stand. He looked at it for a while before reluctantly handing it over to Princess Xinnan. "Bring this to the Grand Emperor to beg him for mercy and protect

Zhenzhu.”

Princess Xinnan crinkled her nose. “What is so special about this stone?”

The Crown Prince tapped on Princess Xinnan’s head lightly and placed the stone under the sunlight.

The word “Fortune” slowly appeared on top of the stone. Princess Xinnan could not help but exclaim, “Wow—”

The Crown Prince was proud. “Don’t rush, there is more.” He flipped the stone over and a “Longevity” word could be seen. “This is called a Light Fortune Stone and there is only one of such stones in the world.”

Princess Xinnan's eye widened. “Elder Brother, you are the best! Thank you, Elder Brother!”

The Crown Prince held onto it for another second before reluctantly placing the Light Fortune Stone into Princess Xinnan’s hands. Seeing her delighted look, he also smiled. *Forget it. After all, someone has to bury the bones after a fish is eaten. If this stone could save a person, it would be worth it.*

Court Lady

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Fu Rou requested to see Empress Zhangsun. She wanted to dismantle the mountain-river embroidery. This was because she had spent numerous days trying to figure it out but did not manage to get anything. She wanted to see the underside of the embroidery in hopes that she would be able to figure something out by studying the sewing pattern.

Empress Zhangsun asked her how confident she was.

“Fifty-percent confident.”

“You are only fifty-percent confident and you dare to ask to open up this precious gift?” Empress Zhangsun frowned. This embroidery was given to her by the Emperor. If they were to dismantle it but still be unable to figure out the secret, it would be disastrous.

“There are two reasons why this picture is precious. The first reason has to do with the secret map behind it. The second reason is that the embroidery skill is unrivalled in this world. Now we have no leads and are unable to find a solution, we surely will not be able to find the secret. However, if we open the picture and examine it, even if we are unable to find out the secret, we can still learn Lady Hui’s embroidery method. If we can thoroughly study her embroidery method and pass on her skills, wouldn’t that be more precious?” Fu Rou spoke truthfully but carefully.

Empress Zhangsun laughed, “After saying so much, you are not so much focused on the finding of the secret map as you are for her embroidery skill. However, it is because you are a seamstress that you will think of passing on Lady Hui’s skills. I did not choose the wrong person. I will allow you to open up the mountain-river embroidery.”

Fu Rou was moved. The small embroidery that she had at home was nothing compared to this mountain-river embroidery. This mountain-river embroidery depicts the lifework of Lady Hui and was a once in a lifetime opportunity for her. It was extremely valuable.

That very night, Fu Rou did not sleep but continued studying the embroidery until dawn. She then brought the mountain-river embroidery to see Empress Zhangsun. However, when Fu Rou delivered her report, Empress Zhangsun’s expression changed.

“Say it one more time!” Empress Zhangsun’s voice rose.

Fu Rou spoke calmly, “I have cut the mountain-river embroidery and it cannot be restored to its original state. Not only did I cut it, I removed several strands from the embroidery.” She then gestured to a palace maid to present the embroidery.

What was originally, mountains, a waterfall and clouds had now turned into an ocean and an island. It was completely different from how it looked originally.

Empress Zhangsun was dumbfounded. “This...”

“This is a picture of an ocean.” Fu Rou’s eyes glimmered in admiration. It was a needlework on top of a needlework and a picture hidden beneath another picture. It would be hard to learn Lady Hui’s mind. “When I opened up the picture, I realised that this embroidery had used a completely unnecessary layer of stitching. In addition, the stitches ended very weirdly as if this was not a completed piece but one that was made up of ten smaller embroideries. So, I first used a scissors to cut along one of the veins. When I cut the embroidery, the picture did not fall apart. Hence, I continued to cut along the other veins and then reassembled the ten small pictures into one big piece. In addition, this embroidery had two layers of heavy stitching. I took

the liberty to carefully remove the top layer.”

Empress Zhangsun came to a realization. “So that was how this picture of the ocean came about.”

Fu Rou pointed at a red dot on the picture. “Perhaps this is where the treasures are hidden. Even if the treasures are a rumour, this embroidery is still a precious artefact.”

Empress Zhangsun nodded. “Good, very good. Head Seamstress Fu, you have done well. I will reward you. What would you like?”

Fu Rou hesitated for a while. “Your Majesty, I would like...”

Empress Zhangsun lifted her hand. “If you are thinking of leaving the palace, don’t bother saying it.”

Fu Rou’s expression changed. *Was it so easy to read her?*

Empress Zhangsun stared at her. “It hasn’t been long since you entered the palace, but everyone is already praising you for your work. Look at all the other female officials, who have had more rewards than you? Is the Royal Palace really like a cage to you? Do you not consider the generous treatment that I have been giving you?”

Fu Rou hurriedly replied, “I am very thankful for Your Majesty’s benevolence and generosity.”

“Since you are thankful, stop thinking about leaving the palace all the time.” Empress Zhangsun smiled slightly. “I am looking forward to you staying by my side for another two to three years. That is not too much to ask right?”

“I understand.” Whether it was too much was a personal opinion. However, Fu Rou knew clearly that she could not say no. She still wanted to live to see the person she loved.

Empress Zhangsun could tell that Fu Rou was holding back. “Don’t feel wronged, I don’t mean you any harm. I just can’t bear to let you go. However, I understand that you miss your family. Since you have made a significant contribution, I shall reward you with one day of

leave every month. You can leave the palace to reunite with your family. Will you be satisfied with that?"

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Fu Rou chuckled bitterly. *At least it does not seem like forever anymore.*

Meanwhile, Princess Xinnan took the Light Fortune Stone with her to see the Grand Emperor. The Grand Emperor was delighted and retracted his command, letting Zhenzhu go. However, the moment Princess Xinnan thought about Sheng Chuling, she became depressed once again. *What if that brat gave up on using kites completely?* She panicked and could not hold back any longer as she ran to the Eastern Palace.

The internal attendant thought that Princess Xinnan came to find the Crown Prince and informed her that the Crown Prince was not in the Eastern Palace at the moment. Princess Xinnan then declared that she was looking for the Crown Princess. She then wandered around the entire Eastern Palace looking for Sheng Chuling.

Eventually, Princess Xinnan caught sight of Sheng Chuling patrolling the grounds with another imperial guard. Although it was obvious that he had seen her, he pretended not to have as he turned and walked away. He wanted to solve her issue with her temper and not cause her misunderstanding to deepen. However, she thought that Sheng Chuling had a change of heart.

"Xinnan, I heard that you came to the Eastern Palace to look for me. I waited for you but did not see you. It turned out you are here." Sun Lingshu came up to her. "I have been bored out of my mind. Thank you for accompanying me to have a chat."

Xinnan was embarrassed as she held onto Sun Lingshu and entered the side palace.

"Xinnan, you don't look very pleased, did something happen?" Sun Lingshu asked.

Princess Xinnan did not dare to let anyone know about this. "Let's not

talk about it. Now that you are with a child, I should not speak about frustrating matters to you.”

Sun Lingshu smiled. “You really know how to talk. No wonder, the Crown Prince dotes on you so much.”

“Sister-in-law, how have you been recently? Has Elder Brother been accompanying you?” Princess Xinnan forced herself to chat.

“Sigh, if only he would accompany me for the entire day. Ever since I became pregnant, he has appeared in front of me less than before. Even if he comes, he will always ask the same few questions. Have you eaten? Did the baby move?” This was not what Sun Lingshu had imagined.

Princess Xinnan spoke up for her elder brother. “That’s quite good of Elder Brother already. At least he did not get seduced by other women while you are pregnant.”

Sun Lingshu’s mouth twitched. “Who said that he has not been seduced? It is just that the person that seduced him is not a woman. Whenever he has some free time, he would go and find a man named Chen Ji. They would go to hunt, fish, or play chess. Recently, the Crown Prince even brought him to the palace to recuperate because Chen Ji got injured.”

Princess Xinnan did not think that it was a big deal. “It’s great that Elder Brother has a friend to accompany him.”

“Although I cannot accompany him to hunt or fish, I can play chess with him. Why must he always look for Chen Ji?” Sun Lingshu could not understand.

A palace maid entered to inform that Fu Rou was here to deliver embroideries.

Sun Lingshu instructed, “I am currently talking to Princess Xinnan. Tell Head Seamstress Fu that she can just leave the embroideries and please thank her.”

Princess Xinnan snorted, “Sister-in-law, why do you need to say thank you to her? She is a female official. It is their duty anyway.”

Sun Lingshu sighed, "Imperial Mother dotes heavily on Head Seamstress Fu. I have to be careful not to offend her."

Princess Xinnan's eyes lit up. "Sister-in-law, you also dislike Head Seamstress Fu?"

"Also?" Sun Lingshu thought that Fu Rou was too likeable and everyone liked her.

"I don't care what you think but I dislike her. In front of you, she pretends to be decent and virtuous. She has even won over Imperial Mother and other concubines. They all think she is a good person. In reality, she secretly seduces other men and is inappropriate. I look down the most on women like her who are double-faced." Princess Xinnan blurted out her grievance in a fit.

Sun Lingshu was curious. "You also know about her and Prince Zhou?"

Xinnan froze. "What Prince Zhou?"

"You don't know?" Sun Lingshu's eyes shifted. "Then forget about it."

Xinnan refused to let her drop it. "Sister-in-law, tell me. Don't hide things from me."

Sun Lingshu shook her head. "It's best if I refrain from gossiping about matters in the palace. Once I tell you, you will feel uncomfortable and cannot do anything to her anyway."

"What makes you think that I cannot do anything to her? Sister-in-law, please tell me."

"She once went against the palace rules and snuck out of the palace with Prince Zhou." Sun Lingshu was delighted to say it. She had tried numerous times to be friendly with Fu Rou but Fu Rou never cared about her. Therefore, there was no need for her to worry about Fu Rou. "But don't tell anyone that I am the one who told you."

"Something like that actually happened?!" Princess Xinnan huffed, "Sister-in-law, rest assured; this has nothing to do with you. Let's see how long she can remain arrogant for!"

Court Lady

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Fu Rou did not know that she had become a problem for the Crown Princess and the Princess as she left the embroideries and headed out of the Eastern Palace. She coincidentally bumped into the Crown Prince and Chen Ji on her way back. This caused her to be momentarily surprised. Every time she saw them together, she could not help but feel strangely worried.

Chen Ji was limping as he called out to her first. “Fu Rou.”

Fu Rou replied, “Chen Ji.”

The Crown Prince remembered that Fu Rou also came from the Han Mansion.

Fu Rou asked Chen Ji, “What happened to your leg?”

The Crown Prince wanted to say that they had gone hunting recently and met with a tiger. Chen Ji helped block him from the tiger and ended up injuring his leg.

Chen Ji, however, spoke first, “Nothing, I fell off a horse and accidentally injured myself. Eh, I wanted to ask you. Where are my clothes?” He saw how Fu Rou was struggling to remember. “I tore my shirt previously and you said that you would help me mend it and even promised to return it to me. Alas, it is like Liubei borrowing Jingzhou, once borrowed, never returned.”

“That shirt...” When Fu Rou left the Han Mansion, she had left in a rush. “I am sorry, I forgot.”

Chen Ji waved his hand, “I am kidding.”

“Hurry up and get better.” Fu Rou then bowed towards the Crown Prince and took her leave.

After Fu Rou left, the Crown Prince teased Chen Ji. “You asked someone to help you mend your clothes. Do you like her? Head Seamstress Fu is pretty good. She is capable and beautiful.”

Chen Ji laughed, “What are you thinking about? We happened to bump into each other that time and she saw that my shirt was torn and said that she would help me mend it. Oh, the first time we met was when I helped you take the eagle from the tree. Didn’t you say that that golden arrow was bestowed on you by your Imperial Father and you could not lose it? It was that time. I tore my shirt because of you.”

The Crown Prince laughed as well. “It was all thanks to that eagle. If not, we would not be friends.”

Chen Ji became serious as he thought about it. “Mmhm, we should thank him. You should bestow the title of General Eagle upon it.”

“I will bestow the title of General Eagle on it and bestow the title of General Eagle Picker on you. Then the entire world will be filled with generals.” The Crown Prince replied in a serious tone, “Do you think that the title of general can be granted anyhow? Gullible!”

They exchanged glances and burst into laughter, wiping away the coldness of the Eastern Palace.

Empress Zhangsun’s attendant, Wei Song, sent over nourishing products to Concubine Yan. Recently, the Emperor often rested at Concubine Yan’s place. As she heard that Concubine Yan was not feeling well, as the Empress, she ought to show care and concern.

Wei Song returned and reported that Concubine Yan was listening to

Master Faya's Buddhist teachings. She was looking perfectly healthy.

As Empress Zhangsun heard this, she coughed.

Wei Song quickly placed a blanket around her. "Your Majesty, you must take care of your body."

"Concubine Yan is so healthy. Even if I have to endure, I have to last a few more years. I can only relax after I personally see the Crown Prince ascend the throne." Empress Zhangsun gripped onto the edges of the blanket.

"Imperial Mother." Princess Xinnan's voice floated in.

Empress Zhangsun sighed, "I also have this daughter that makes me worry."

However, after Princess Xinnan told her that Fu Rou snuck out of the palace with Prince Zhou, Empress Zhangsun no longer blamed her daughter. She immediately called for a sedan to carry her to Concubine Yan's palace. Fu Rou had to be punished for going against the palace rules but Prince Zhou would not be spared either. A mother cannot be spared from her child's actions. She worried all day and had insomnia. *How could she just let Concubine Yan enjoy carefree days?*

Concubine Yan greeted her with trepidation. Prince Zhou was coincidentally present as well.

"Concubine Yan, I initially did not want to trouble you as you have just recovered. However, I can no longer bear this. I came over to ask Prince Zhou if in your eyes, you still have me as an Empress?" Empress Zhangsun saw that Concubine Yan was indeed looking well and charming. It was no wonder that the Emperor favoured her.

Concubine Yan feared having her son in trouble the most and panicked. "Your Majesty, why do you say that? What has Prince Zhou done wrong?"

"He took the liberty to bring Head Seamstress Fu out of the palace. Prince Zhou, you are disregarding the palace rules. Is it because you are certain that I won't be able to punish you?" Although Empress

Zhangsun was talking about Prince Zhou, she was staring at Concubine Yan.

Concubine Yan saw that her son was silently admitting to his faults, and immediately knelt. “Prince Zhou made a mistake. Please be benevolent, Your Majesty. It is my fault for not teaching him well and allowing him to do whatever he wants. If Your Majesty wishes to punish someone, please punish me.”

Prince Zhou knelt as well. “Your Majesty, if you wish to punish, please punish me. Please do not hold it against my mother.”

“Prince Zhou, your mother has just recovered, quick help her up. Don’t let her kneel.” *Since she has already knelt, she will remember just who the master of the six palaces is.*

Prince Zhou quickly helped Concubine Yan up.

“You all don’t know how difficult it is to manage the harem. As the Empress, I am only one person and rely on palace rules to manage so many people. If everyone does not abide by the palace rules, the six palaces will be in chaos. Prince Zhou, your actions have really put me in a difficult position.” Empress Zhangsun’s tone changed, “Concubine Yan, the Emperor favours you and the Emperor also adores Prince Zhou. I can help you cover up the matter this time.”

Concubine Yan bowed. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“However, the palace has its rules and Prince Zhou cannot go against them anymore.” Empress Zhangsun stared at Prince Zhou. Prince Zhou initially refused to reply. However, as Concubine Yan secretly tugged on his sleeve, he finally answered with a “Yes.”

“The Emperor has many heirs to begin with and tens of thousands of palace maids have joined us this year. The harem has also expanded and became more difficult to manage. I was intending to reorganise the palace records. Concubine Yan, would you be able to help me?” Empress Zhangsun suddenly asked.

Prince Zhou immediately replied, “Mother’s health...”

Concubine Yan cut him off, “Of course, I will be willing to help. I

have nothing to do everyday and would love to help Your Majesty.”

Empress Zhangsun pretended to be delighted. “Great. Then the first thing I need you to do is to manage the movement in and out of the palace. The number of people that can enter the harem is currently extremely complicated. The Emperor’s harem currently allows anyone to enter. How can this be? From tomorrow onwards, any monks or priests have to get the Emperor or my permission before they are allowed to enter the harem.”

Prince Zhou opened his mouth to speak but Concubine Yan tugged on his sleeve once more.

“Your Majesty is right. Entry to the harem should be more restricted. If the movement into the palace is stricter, Prince Zhou would also not be able to make a mistake anymore.” Concubine Yan knew from the start that the Empress came to make her life difficult.

Empress Zhangsun nodded. “It is exactly as you said.” *This world belonged to her son and no one was going to steal it away.*

Aaaiiii so much drama. Life in the palace is tough. Drama between concubines, princes, dukes, servants...

If you could get a role in the palace, who would you want to be? And why?

Court Lady

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Fu Rou held onto the wall to support herself. Her knees felt like they were getting pricked by numerous needles and she could not straighten them.

She had just come from Lizheng Palace where she was punished to kneel for half a day after Empress Zhangsun found out she had left the palace with Prince Zhou previously. There was no wall that was impenetrable by wind. This time, she was only punished to kneel. The Empress even asked Wei Song to give her medicine promoting blood circulation, showing how much the Empress cared for her. After staying in the palace, eventually everyone's wish would eventually resign to just staying alive. She was no exception.

All of a sudden, she tripped over a crack on the ground and stumbled forward. Before she could fall, a hand reached out to hold her.

"Prince Zhou -- Ah!" She exclaimed in surprise. She did not have time to react as Prince Zhou carried her in his arms. She shouted in protest, "What are you doing!"

Prince Zhou spoke in a low voice, "Shout all you want. It is not my problem if people come because of your shouting!" Fu Rou had no choice but to allow him to bring her back to Lingxiao Palace.

Prince Zhou placed Fu Rou on the couch and grabbed her ankle. He then rolled up the side of her skirt. Fu Rou was shocked as she

struggled to get away and curled up in a corner.

Prince Zhou held a bottle of medicine as he said, "I just want to help you apply medicine."

"Her Majesty has already given me medicine." Fu Rou said as she took out a bottle of medicine. "Moreover, I have only injured my knees. If Your Highness were to help me apply medicine, I won't be able to face anyone else."

Prince Zhou seemed to ignore the last part of what she said and his eyes hardened. He snatched the bottle of medicine and smashed it on the ground. "I don't need her fake kindness!"

Fu Rou assessed his words and facial expression. "Did Her Majesty also punish Your Highness as well?"

"She did not punish me. However, she did something worse than punishing me."

Empress Zhangsun always used him to control his mother. "She never shows her evil intentions outrightly but always secretly kills two birds with one stone."

Fu Rou felt guilty. "It is all my fault."

"No, it has nothing to do with you." Prince Zhou let out a bitter laugh. "She merely used you to do what she wanted and took the chance to put me and my mother down. Ever since I was young, I could never get close to anybody. As soon as someone treats me well or I start getting attached to someone, something will always happen to them. My nanny who doted on me got chased out of the palace for breaking palace rules. There was a palace maid that was like my elder sister. She knew I was afraid of the dark and always stayed by my bed every night to tell me stories. Eventually, she became slightly ill and passed away. I don't wish to hurt anybody and always kept my distance. Even if I am still scared of the dark, I would no longer ask someone to accompany me and instead read books to get me through."

Fu Rou looked at him sympathetically. She didn't expect such a tragic

reason behind his love for reading.

“Tutor Qian used to teach me and was like a father to me. Because of them, he was sent to the Qi State. I always call you over just so I can have someone to talk to. But I know that eventually, I will cause you harm.” Alas, because of him, she was punished by the Empress.

“If it is just to talk, that will not be a problem. I learned a lot from talking to Your Highness.” This came from her heart.

Prince Zhou looked into Fu Rou’s eyes and waved his hand. “Don’t look at me with those sympathetic eyes. Even though I am unlucky, it is not so bad that I need a female official to pity me. I am not feeling great today so I said a few words. Just let my words go in one ear and out the other. Don’t take it to heart.”

It was rare that Fu Rou listened to him obediently. “Okay, in one ear and out the other.”

“I guess you are clever.” Prince Zhou finally smiled. “The Empress said that I have no regard for palace rules? I merely took a female official out of the palace for a while. That perfect son of hers that is going to ascend the throne even walk boldly along the streets, in broad daylight, with that actor. I really want to ask Imperial Father, who is the one that is not abiding by the rules?”

Fu Rou was startled and immediately pleaded, “Chen Ji is innocent. I beg Your Highness to not bring this up to His Majesty.”

Prince Zhou was surprised. “You are usually extremely stubborn. Now, you are actually begging me on behalf of someone you hardly know?”

Fu Rou replied, “If the Emperor knows about this, he will simply scold the Crown Prince. However, most of the punishment will fall onto Chen Ji. Prince Zhou, you won’t be able to vent your anger on the Crown Prince. How can Chen Ji bear the brunt of the Emperor’s anger? I am not kneeling just for Chen Ji, but also for you.”

Prince Zhou looked up.

“Your Highness is well-educated from all the books you read. Please

do not let the beauty in you become the base of evil. Without compassion, kindness and sympathy, no matter how high a position one reaches, they will never be happy. I do not wish to see Your Highness become someone like that.” Sun Lingshu had changed so much, Fu Rou did not even want to go near her.

“Then will I be happy if I let them attack and put me down?” In the moment that he saw the Empress step over his mother, an evil root had appeared in his heart.

“Remain true to yourself and you will have a clear conscience.”

Prince Zhou remained silent for a while. “Okay, I promise you. I won’t use this to get back at the Empress. It is neither for Chen Ji nor for myself but for you, Fu Rou.”

Princess Xinnan finally received a letter from Sheng Chuling asking to meet her at a lake outside the city. She was overjoyed. In order to sneak out of the palace, she begged the Crown Prince, and lied to him that she dreamt of Bodhisattva telling her that she must leave the palace that afternoon.

The Crown Prince obviously did not fall for her nonsense but just took it as his sister wanting to go out and play. He thought of how hard it was for her to leave the palace and agreed.

In addition, he happened to have a surprise for Chen Ji and did not mind giving it early. Chen Ji had been saving up in order to buy a small property for himself to settle down. These days, Chen Ji has been accompanying him to fish, hunt and play chess.

Whenever he was troubled, Chen Ji would help him resolve his troubles and even saved him from the tiger. He thought that the only way to show his thanks was to give him a house of his own.

The security around the palace gates were a lot stricter than before. They had to obtain a special pass from the Empress before they could leave the palace. This was how Master Faya was banned from entering. However, no one dared to impose these rules on the Crown

Prince and allowed him to bring anyone he wanted out of the palace. They probably did not realise that Princess Xinnan was among the guards that followed the Crown Prince out.

After they left the palace, Princess Xinnan parted ways with the Crown Prince. She then rushed to the lake outside the city.

The water was turquoise while the sky was dark blue. However, Princess Xinnan was not interested as she focused on her reflection in the water and tried to neaten her appearance.

When Sheng Chuling appeared, she hurriedly put away her face powder. Princess Xinnan crossed her arms and pouted. She wanted to let him know that things were serious this time and she was not going to forgive him unless he coaxed her.

When Sheng Chuling got closer, his expression did not look good and he did not say anything.

Princess Xinnan could not stand the silence. "You ask me to come out but you are not saying anything. What do you want?"

"Head Seamstress Fu was punished to kneel by the Empress for leaving the palace. Were you the one that told on her?" Sheng Chuling heard this from the other guards but could not wrap his head around it.

Princess Xinnan was furious as she pointed at Sheng Chuling. "You asked me out just to ask me this?"

"That's right. So was it you?" Sheng Chuling had to know.

Princess Xinnan shouted, "Yes! It was me. So what? I don't think my mother punished her severely enough. How can she only be punished to kneel? She should at least have her legs broken and lofty face disfigured!"

Sheng Chuling's expression sank. "Say it again!"

Princess Xinnan suddenly felt extremely wronged. "Did you forget that I took a beating on your behalf? Today, you are actually shouting at me because of Head Seamstress Fu..."

"I am shouting at you because you are in the wrong." *This Princess is pissing him off! Last time, she had dirtied the embroidery pieces and caused his brother to punish him by doing the horse stance. This time, she caused Fu Rou to get punished. Will his Elder Brother hang him up and beat him?*

Princess Xinnan decided to reveal her true thoughts. "This is all because you are fickle minded and choose to fool around with her."

Sheng Chuling froze. "What nonsense are you saying?"

"I saw you and Head Seamstress Fu in the garden. Both of you were laughing and she even gave you a pouch, a spice bag and fans. All that is missing are clothes!"

Sheng Chuling's mouth dropped open. "Oh my god, that is not for me, it was for my elder brother!"

Princess Xinnan froze.

"Head Seamstress Fu is my future sister-in-law." Sheng Chuling did not know whether to pity Xinnan or himself.

"Ah?" Xinnan was so stunned she turned around in several circles. "Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"Did you ever ask me? After seeing me talk to her once, you disregarded everything and fought with me every time we met. You even went to complain to the Empress!"

He wanted to jump. After so long, it was because she had thought that he had something going on with his sister-in-law. He was really speechless. "We can't be together anymore."

"Why not?" Princess Xinnan did not think that it was so serious.

"An elder brother is like a father and an elder sister-in-law is like a mother. You caused my sister-in-law to suffer and still want to marry into our Duke Lu Residence and become our second daughter-in-law?" *Just Elder Brother was enough to stop them.*

"I didn't want to do this. It was my sister-in-law that told me and

hinted at me to complain to Imperial Mother.”

“What sister-in-law?” *When did another one appear?*

“The Crown Princess.” Princess Xinnan was not going to take the blame for this. Sheng Chuling immediately pondered on this.

Court Lady

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The Crown Prince was fuming as he entered the Qin Palace. His mood had started brilliantly that day. Chen Ji was delighted to receive the residence that the Crown Prince gave him and even wanted to treat the Crown Prince to a meal. Who knew that Prince Han would call him to the Han Mansion and told him that Xinnan was the one that complained to Imperial Mother, causing Fu Rou to be punished. He then found out that Xinnan did it because the Crown Princess instigated her to. Prince Han wanted to ask if the Han Mansion had offended the Crown Prince in any way given that it was the Crown Princess that did it and Fu Rou came from the Han Mansion.

Sun Lingshu did not realise that the Crown Prince was in a bad mood but felt happy that the Crown Prince had come over on his own accord. The Crown Prince picked up a cup off the table and threw it with all his might. Sun Lingshu retreated a few steps out of fright.

“Imperial Father has over ten princes but there are only two princes with the same mother. Lizhi is just a child. Prince Han is talented in literature and father deeply appreciates him. I have always hoped for the both of them to support me. The previous time when I had gotten news of Prince Zhou taking Head Seamstress Fu out of the palace, I wanted to report it to Imperial Father. You were the one that stopped me. You asked me to consider Han Mansion’s position. I was impressed and thought that you were someone that was able to

consider the bigger picture. However, you turned around and told this to Xinnan and even instigated her to complain to Imperial Mother! Now, Prince Han suspects me and came to ask me what issue I have with him!”

Sun Lingshu replied timidly, “I didn’t know Xinnan would...”

“Don’t say that you don’t know! You know everything! I know you don’t want me to have other women, and I see you causing drama for the Seamstress Department. I can look over all of this as a woman’s petty issue. However, if you dare to ruin my plans, don’t blame me for not giving you face!” The Crown Prince then flicked his sleeve in anger and left.

Sun Lingshu fell into the chair as she sobbed silently. Shuangxi comforted her, “Be careful of your baby.”

Sun Lingshu cried, “I merely chatted with Princess Xinnan for a while. At that time, there was also no one else, how did Prince Han find out? Could it be that Xinnan betrayed me and broke her promise to me to keep this a secret? I never thought that I would have this kind of sister-in-law.”

Shuangxi’s eyes shifted as she analyzed the situation. “Princess Xinnan does not have any issues with Your Highness. I don’t think she is someone like that. I think this issue has nothing to do with Princess Xinnan but someone else in the palace must have reported this to the Han Mansion.”

Sun Lingshu’s gaze turned strict. When she first entered the palace, several of the people in the Eastern Palace were chosen by Consort Han. Even if she guarded herself day and night, it was hard to guard herself against those in her own residence. It seems like it was time to clear out these old people.

On this day, Fu Rou was allowed to leave the palace to visit her relatives. From early in the morning, Sheng Chumu waited for her at the palace gate before bringing her to a lake outside the city.

The number of days that they had spent apart was uncountable. Although they were both in Chang'an, it was two entirely different worlds in and out of the palace. It was only today that the both of them could finally meet and talk.

The morning light turned into the afternoon sun. Fu Rou finally heard all Sheng Chumu had to say of his experiences after being sent out. Even though he was right before her eyes at this very moment, she still felt the fear of war. She had almost permanently said goodbye to him.

"It would be great if I could leave the palace earlier. Then no matter where you are, I can accompany you." *Even death would not separate them.*

"Rou'er." Sheng Chumu called her name softly.

"Hmm?" Fu Rou turned her head and bumped into Sheng Chumu's lips. Her face immediately reddened but she did not move back. She slowly shut her eyes.

Sheng Chumu greedily breathed in Fu Rou's addictive scent as his two hands held the sides of her face. He kissed her deeply. He had never experienced such a strong emotion before. He wanted to get infinitely closer to her and cherish her. However, he did not dare to be impatient. Eventually, he controlled his own impulses and stood up, pulling Fu Rou up as well. They held hands as they strolled.

"I can't believe Fang Ziyan saved you." The actions of the Lu family's father-son pair were all expected. However, Fu Rou never thought that Fang Ziyan would also help.

"He saved me and I saved him." Sheng Chumu did not want to look weak. "His Majesty has allowed him to pledge his allegiance. Fang Ziyan should have just received the news from the court now. Ultimately, it is still thanks to you. Without that picture of the ocean, His Majesty would not have been so happy and may not have given the pirates another chance. Now, not only has he pardoned Fang Ziyan, he is even rewarding Fang Ziyan for keeping the other pirates in check. His Majesty has rewarded the picture of the treasure to Fang Ziyan and is even going to give him the title of General

Zhenhai. Fang Ziyang has really gained quite a lot this time.”

“Last time, you were relentlessly chasing each other on the ocean and you were almost killed by him. Who knew that it would turn to this.” Fu Rou was incredibly moved. “Fate is hard to predict.”

“Rou’er, when he comes to Chang’an, you better not mention anything to do with fate in front of him. That guy definitely has improper thoughts. He even stole the spice pouch that you embroidered for me. However, I took it back. Hehe, you are mine.”

He really did not like the look Fang Ziyang had every time he talked about Fu Rou. It was as if they were very familiar with each other.

Fu Rou hit Sheng Chumu and suddenly remembered something. “What do you mean I am yours? I am not an item.”

Sheng Chumu nodded in agreement. “Yes, you are not a thing. You are the woman that I have decided to marry.”

Fu Rou laughed in exasperation. “You are the thing.”

“Rou’er, I’ll be your thing.” Sheng Chumu giggled.

“You almost got killed as Lu Yunji’s assistant general. Will Third Brother be safe in Lu Yunji’s army?” Fu Rou suddenly missed Fu Tao.

“Lu Yunji schemed against me because I am the future Duke Lu. However, he does not know that Xi Tao is Fu Tao. I heard that Lu Yunji regards Fu Tao quite highly. I will find a chance to let you all meet.” Sheng Chumu hit his chest as a sign of guarantee. He then hugged Fu Rou gently. “Okay, it is rare that you get to come out of the palace, let’s talk about our love.”

Fu Rou pursed her lips and laughed, “I don’t know how to.”

“You don’t know? Then let me teach you. Mmhm, Chumu, you are so handsome. Chumu, you are the manliest man on earth. Chumu, one day without you is like three autumns passing in loneliness...”

Fu Rou sputtered out a laugh, “You are very good at this, continue.”

Sheng Chumu reacted quickly. “Not me, you are the one who should say it.”

Fu Rou replied seriously, “I don’t know how to say sweet words, I can only embroider and dye.”

“It is very easy. Just repeat after me.” Sheng Chumu displayed his ability to annoy others. “I narrowly managed to escape from death this time. I was surrounded by the rebel army and fell down the canyon. Did you know what I was thinking at that time? I was thinking, I haven’t heard Rou’er speak lovingly to me before. I don’t know what she thinks of me as a person? What qualities do I have? What does she like about me? Today, I must hear whatever I want to know. Tell me everything.”

“Fine.” Looking at Sheng Chumu’s expectant face, Fu Rou emphasised, “I will repeat after you.”

“Okay, then follow me. Chumu, you are the most handsome man on earth.”

“Chumu...” Fu Rou hesitated, “You are...the most handsome...man on earth.”

Sheng Chumu suddenly asked, “Rou’er, since when did I become handsome in your eyes?”

Fu Rou answered naturally, “When you fell down from the tree.”

Sheng Chumu was curious. “I was so ugly then, how was I handsome? There were so many other times where I was handsome and powerful but you only remember the time when I fell from the tree.”

“That night, I was feeling helpless and was talking to the moon. All of a sudden, you fell from the tree and into my life. Every time I think back on it, I would always feel that you look very very handsome when you fell. You are like the sun shining into the darkest pits, lighting everything up.” Fu Rou recalled the moment and spoke sincerely.

Sheng Chumu was deeply moved. “I have good taste. I found such a

brilliant wife. She can embroider, dye and is even great at sweet talk. I...cannot stand this anymore, let's kiss!" He hugged her and kissed her intimately.

A light breeze caused the branches of a willow tree to sway gently, quietly exposing a pair of snuggled bodies. Their silhouettes contrasted against the crystal clear water. It was sweet and joyful.

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When Fu Rou returned to the palace, she had to deliver embroideries to Princess Xinnan. She had expected to be met with a cold face but was surprised when Princess Xinnan shouted and jumped onto her.

“Wah! This is great! Amazing! Perfect! Outstanding! I have never seen such a beautiful piece of embroidery in my life! Head Seamstress Fu, your skills are amazing!”

Fu Rou looked at Xinnan in surprise. Princess Xinnan pulled Fu Rou personally. “Head Seamstress Fu, please have a seat.” She then took the tea from Zhenzhu and offered it respectfully, “Head Seamstress Fu, please have some tea.”

Fu Rou felt uncomfortable sitting down. “Your Highness, this...”

“Head Seamstress Fu, I am sorry for mistreating you previously and making you suffer. Please accept my apologies.” Princess Xinnan stated openly.

A husband’s family is a woman’s future home. Sheng Chuling’s elder sister-in-law will be someone that she has to face frequently in the future and get along with for the rest of her life.

Fu Rou hurriedly got up. “Your Highness, you must not say this. I am merely a female official, the rules...”

"I know the rules. An elder brother is like a father while an elder sister-in-law is like a mother. Head Seamstress Fu, you are Sheng Chuling's future elder sister-in-law. If only you had told me sooner, I would have treated you a thousand times, ten thousand times better! I offended you because I didn't know. You have to forgive me."

Fu Rou blushed. "Chuling...told you?"

Princess Xinnan nodded. "He told me, he told me everything. I was muddled. Sister-in-law, you have an upright personality and do things properly. Everyone in the palace knows about you but I didn't know you and had misunderstood. Please don't be angry with me. Are you angry with me?"

"No." *It was her fault in the first place, she could not blame anyone else.*

Princess Xinnan spoke carefully, "Sister-in-law, then you won't object to me and Sheng Chuling being together?"

Fu Rou laughed, "It is not for me to object."

"It is good as long as you don't object. Then if I get Sheng Chuling from the Eastern Palace to be my guard, Sister-in-law, you won't object right?"

Fu Rou was laughing so hard that she could barely move. "The Imperial Guards Office is responsible for the guards allocation. It is also not my position to say anything."

Princess Xinnan repeated the same thing, "It is good as long as you don't object!"

When Fu Rou was leaving, Princess Xinnan personally sent her out. Even when Fu Rou disappeared from view, she was still waving --

"Today's embroidery is good. It cannot be any better! I am extremely satisfied! Head Seamstress Fu, come over whenever you have time. I have tea and snacks and..."

Even Zhenzhu wanted to laugh. "She is already gone."

Princess Xinnan breathed a huge sigh of relief. "Aiyo, I managed to

deal with her. I treated her so well, so she should not have any issues with me and Sheng Chuling.”

Zhenzhu replied, “Head Seamstress Fu is not such a petty person.”

Princess Xinnan asked fiercely, “Then are you trying to say that I am petty?”

Zhenzhu was silent and immediately shook her head.

While Xinnan and Fu Rou’s relationship was mended, cracks appeared in the relationship between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion.

Sun Lingshu framed a palace maid, Dong’er, who came from Consort Han. She made up an excuse that Dong’er stole a bracelet and forcefully sent her away. She wanted to show Prince Han and Consort Han that she was not someone they could look down upon and talk bad about to the Crown Prince. Consort Han did not retaliate and seemed to understand her message.

On this day, Sun Lingwei entered the palace. She said that her marriage talk with the son of Duke Cheng, Peiji, had not gone well. Instead, Peiji was interested in Lu Yunji’s daughter.

Sun Lingshu was disagreeable with Lu Yingying. She thought that Lu Yingying had set her eyes on the son of Duke Cheng because she did not manage to become the Crown Princess and wanted to steal her sister’s potential husband. Sun Lingshu could not let this go. She then personally made chicken soup and invited the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince recalled how he got angry with Sun Lingshu over Fu Rou’s matter even though she was pregnant, and felt slightly guilty. Hence, he came over. After drinking one bowl, he wanted a second bowl.

“Today, His Majesty talked to Duke Cheng for a long time.” Sun Lingshu thought that this was a good opportunity.

The Crown Prince did not think anything of it and simply made a

sound of acknowledgement. Sun Lingshu faked a sigh. “Your Highness is kind and magnanimous. You trust everyone and treat them well. However, not all officials are as trustworthy and reliable.”

The Crown Prince stopped drinking. “What do you want to say, Crown Princess?”

“I don’t know what Duke Cheng is thinking. They know that our Sun family is definitely loyal to Your Highness, yet, they look down on our Sun family and decide to get together with the Lu family...”

“The taste of this soup has changed.” The Crown Prince suddenly placed down his bowl and stood up.

Actually, when Duke Cheng came, he had also asked him this. However, Duke Cheng helped him understand everything clearly. First of all, Duke Cheng wanted to avoid trouble. He was preventing the Emperor from being wary of the Crown Prince’s power. Lu Yunji was still loyal to the Emperor and Duke Cheng wanted to use marriage as a way of winning over Lu Yunji onto the Crown Prince’s side. That is why Duke Cheng chose the Lu family’s daughter. He had wanted to explain this to Sun Lingshu but did not expect her to bring it up first and try to incite disharmony.

Sun Lingshu did not know that she had caused the Crown Prince to be displeased. “If the taste of the soup has changed, there are still other dishes. I made them myself. Your Highness, please try them before you leave.”

“I am full.” The Crown Prince spoke coldly, “As the heir to the throne, I understand people’s intentions. As long as no one intentionally incites disharmony, the ministers by my side are all reliable and trustworthy. I don’t need you to worry about this and point things out to me.”

As Sun Lingshu watched the Crown Prince leave, she felt wronged.

Shuangxi sniffed the bowl of soup. “The taste of the chicken soup did not change.”

Sun Lingshu gritted her teeth. “The taste of the chicken soup didn’t

change but his feelings have. When I first entered the Eastern Palace, the Crown Prince was considerate and reasonable. Now, he has been bewitched by those beside him.”

As Chen Ji was summoned into the Crown Prince’s study, he realised that the Crown Prince was not in a good mood.

“Eh? Weren’t you in a good mood when the Crown Princess invited you to drink chicken soup? You mentioned that you might have scolded her too harshly because of the matter with Head Seamstress Fu and wanted to find a chance to accompany her.”

“Don’t mention it, play chess with me.” The Crown Prince brought out a chess set.

Chen Ji shook his head. “Why are you angry with the Crown Princess again? When a woman is pregnant, their temper will worsen. You should give in to her more.”

The Crown Prince rolled his eyes. “I can give in to her in other things, but there are some things that she does that I really cannot stand. A married woman’s opinion will ruin big plans. If I don’t teach her a lesson, I don’t know what kind of trouble she will cause in the future. If only she could be like you, simple and dumb.”

“How am I dumb? Look.” Chen Ji placed a black bead on the chess board and looked at the Crown Prince sympathetically. “Your big dragon is dead.”

“Your big dragon is the one that is dead.” The Crown Prince placed down a white bead, determining the winner.

Chen Ji was stunned. “Can I replay my move?”

“What do you think?” Looking at Chen Ji’s frustrated face, the Crown Prince laughed. “How about this? Whoever loses in chess will drink as a punishment.”

Chen Ji smiled. “Okay, you have a lot of good wine here, I can get addicted.”

Alas, Chen Ji lost game after game. Seeing how happy he looked while he was drinking, the Crown Prince decided to join him. They drank until they were drunk as they lay down on the couch, promptly falling asleep.

The both of them fell asleep without a care in the world. However, their actions startled two others. The first was Official Situ, who recently has been patrolling daily. The other was Shuangxi, who was sent by Sun Lingshu to find out where the Crown Prince had gone to rest.

Light shone as daybreak. Birds started to look for food as they chirped noisily.

The Crown Prince turned around on the bed. He opened his eyes only to stare straight into Chen Ji's face. He sat up in shock. Chen Ji was awoken by his huge movement as he rubbed his eyes and sat up.

"What..." The Crown Prince looked around and realised that they were in the study room. He recalled their drinking session the previous night. "From now on, we cannot drink when we play chess. Otherwise, who knows what we'd do."

"Huh? We wouldn't do anything if we're drunk. We would be lying down." Chen Ji felt that he was not accurate.

"Thankfully no one saw us. Make sure you don't go out and spread this." Regardless, the Crown Prince knew he did not behave according to etiquette.

"It is also my reputation, okay? You are also not allowed to spread rumours." Chen Ji jumped off the couch and straightened his clothes.

At this moment, the internal attendants reported that Official Situ requested an audience. The Crown Prince pointed out that they did not complete their game the previous day and told Chen Ji to think about how to turn the situation around before he returns. However, given his lousy chess skills, Chen Ji did not know what there was to think about. Nonetheless, he still gazed at the chess pieces and thought about it seriously.

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Not long after, Fu Rou passed by the Crown Prince's study room and saw Shuangxi behaving suspiciously and trying to look through the window gaps. She then snuck away. When she saw Shuangxi behave in this manner the previous time, Official Situ had lost three pearls. Fu Rou could not help but feel concerned as she purposely walked to the front door of the study, only to see Chen Ji sitting in there.

"Chen Ji, why have you entered the palace again?" She had a bad feeling about this.

Chen Ji spoke frankly, "I helped His Highness and in order to thank me, His Highness gave me a small house in Chang'an. However, the furniture is not ready and my leg is still injured. Hence, His Highness asked me to stay in the Eastern Palace for a few days to accompany him to play chess. When the furniture is ready, I will leave. Oh, my small house is along Luoye Alley. Come pay me a visit when you have time. That will be my home in the future. I don't have many friends, but you are one of them."

Fu Rou fell silent for a moment. "Since we are friends, can I say something honestly?"

Chen Ji replied, "Just say it."

"You should not get too close to His Highness." *She could convince Prince Zhou but she could not stop the masses from talking.*

"I am simply friends with His Highness, I never thought of gaining anything from him. He was the one who brought me to the house, that's how I found out about it." Chen Ji's thoughts were simple.

Fu Rou sighed, "The Crown Prince is not like everyone else. He is the heir to the throne. If people were to know that you are friends with him, it will not be good for you or the Crown Prince."

"So this is because I am an actor."

Fu Rou replied, "I am just direct, don't get angry."

Chen Ji shook his head. "I am not angry, I also feel that this is not very appropriate. But we get along very well. Forget it, when I see the Crown Prince later on, I will bid him farewell and leave the Eastern Palace."

"It is good that you can think this way." Fu Rou smiled and left.

Soon, the Crown Prince returned to the study room. It was obvious that he was distracted as he played. Official Situ specially came to warn him after catching him drunk with Chen Ji the previous night. The Crown Prince believed that they were not behaving inappropriately but understood what Official Situ was trying to say. The worst that could happen was someone intentionally creating rumours out of it.

Thereafter, the Crown Prince found out that he was not the only one that was distracted. Chen Ji placed a black bead and made a fundamental mistake.

The Crown Prince pointed to the other corner. "You should put it here."

"Here? Then my pieces here are doomed." Chen Ji could not understand.

"Although you have to sacrifice these pieces, you protected your big dragon. At critical moments, you have to sacrifice small in order to protect the bigger picture. In chess, this is called abandoning pieces."

"So this is what abandoning means. Your Highness, you said that life

is like a chess game. Will there be a lot of abandoned pieces in your life?"

"They appear at any time." The Crown Prince asked a question after he answered. "Do you think I am very heartless?"

Chen Ji smiled. "No, you are doing the right thing. I understand abandoning. It is like Zhao Zilong's Seven Charges into Changbanpo. When he met with Madam Gan and Ah Dou, Zhao Zilong could not save the both of them. In order to help Zhao Zilong escape with Ah Dou, Madam Gan jumped into the well. Madam Gan was an abandoned piece. If she didn't die, Zhao Zilong and Ah Dou would have died with her."

The Crown Prince realised what he was getting at and stared at Chen Ji. "Luckily you are Zhao Zilong and not Madam Gan."

"Your Highness, I know that you treat me as a close friend. If you ever need to use me as an abandoned piece, I am fine with it."

"Shut up. For no rhyme or reason, you can't say such unlucky words. You are really not sensible." The Crown Prince stared at the chessboard as he rubbed a chess piece between his fingers for a long time. "Chen Ji, even if something happens in the future, I will not treat you as an abandoned piece. This is my promise to you."

Chen Ji looked at the focused Crown Prince. "I am leaving."

The Crown Prince suddenly lifted his head. "Where are you going?"

"Home."

Chen Ji suddenly understood. Fu Rou was right. The Eastern Palace was not a place where he should be.

Prince Han rushed back home and showed Consort Han the rouge liquid that he bought for her. However, Consort Han did not behave like she usually did and did not even spare a glance. She stared at the paper in her hand and could not stop shaking her head and sighing.

Prince Han did not like it when she frowned and asked out of concern, "What happened?"

"The Crown Princess suddenly asked us to lend our actors to them and specified that she wanted Chen Ji to go over." Consort Han knew that she had an ulterior motive.

She had just gotten Dong'er, who the Crown Princess had chased out two days ago. She took into consideration the brothers' relationship and was not calculative. Unfortunately, the Grand Emperor fell recently and the Empress requested for the Crown Prince to care for him. The Crown Prince had just left when the Crown Princess sent a request for Chen Ji to go and act. Her actions could not be pure.

"It is true that Chen Ji has been too close to the Crown Prince recently. It is no wonder that the Crown Princess is unhappy. However, he is still injured. I don't think we should let him go." Prince Han was worried that something would happen.

Consort Han shook her head. "No, we have to let Chen Ji go. Firstly, it is because of you. We should not destroy the relationship between us and the Eastern Palace. The Crown Princess has requested something from us. If we avoid it, she would think that we are getting back at her. I am afraid that she will bear a grudge against you. Secondly, it is for Chen Ji. The Crown Princess is the Crown Princess after all. If we don't let her vent her anger on Chen Ji, she will hold a grudge and if she explodes in the future, Chen Ji won't be able to bear it. Chen Ji will be going over to act for her. At most, she will make things difficult for him but he can just hold it in."

"You are right, let's do as you say. We will let Chen Ji go over for the Crown Princess to vent slightly. Sigh, since she had become the Crown Princess, we have to be careful of everything regarding the Eastern Palace. Things are no longer as easy as before. Women are so difficult and petty." Prince Han suddenly felt eyes burning into him. His tongue was glib and immediately corrected, "Oh, I said it wrongly. I meant the Crown Princess is difficult and petty. If she was like you, beautiful, smart and gentle, she would be easy to deal with."

Consort Han smiled. "You are right."

Meanwhile, the Han Mansion's acting troupe entered the Eastern Palace and Fu Rou also received the news. She felt the same as Consort Han and believed that things were not as simple as they seemed. She personally brought a few palace maids to the Eastern Palace and set up red silks around the troupe.

Sun Lingshu saw how Fu Rou came uninvited and became suspicious. "What are you doing?"

Fu Rou replied calmly, "I heard that Your Highness will be watching a show here. Hence, I have asked them to hang red silk around the stage. Firstly, it is to improve the celebratory atmosphere. Secondly, it is for good luck. This has been passed down from olden days. It is said to be good for pregnant women and their child. Her Majesty, the Empress, has also instructed me before. Since you are pregnant now, no matter what you do, it has to be auspicious."

As Sun Lingshu was most concerned about her baby now, she did not say anything more after hearing what Fu Rou had to say.

The gong sounded as the show started. In the beginning, Chen Ji was performing with ease. However, as his movements kept changing, his injury started to show itself. It was obvious that he was not steady and swayed several times on stage. Thankfully he was able to remain steady and complete the show.

Sun Lingshu clapped slowly as she smiled coldly. "Great singing, no wonder the Crown Prince never gets tired. Sing again."

The gong sounded as Chen Ji performed once again. However, he could escape once but he could not escape forever. He stepped into empty space and fell off the stage.

Sun Lingshu remained expressionless and watched on without even blinking. *This despicable man was not even worthy of helping her put on her shoes. How dare he sleep on the same bed as the Crown Prince and bewitch him? It will be best if such a shameless person were to fall to their death.*

However, Sun Lingshu did not get what she hoped for as Chen Ji was saved by the red silk as he fell. He merely sprained his leg. Sun Lingshu could not make things difficult for him anymore and was forced to allow the performance troupe to return.

As the performers slowly dispersed, Sun Lingshu caught sight of Fu Rou standing beside Chen Ji. Fu Rou was looking at him in concern. Sun Lingshu looked at the red silk once again and could not help the menacing look that flashed across her eyes.

As expected, the people from the Han Mansion were all working together!

Court Lady

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On this day, Official Situ came to Lizheng Palace to bid farewell. She had been awarded with Empress Zhangsun's grace and was allowed to leave the palace to retire. To female officials, this was a blessing.

Empress Zhangsun could not bear to let her go and was slightly regretful. "In a blink of an eye, so many years have passed. When you first entered the palace by my side, you were only a young girl in your teens. Now, you even have white hair along your temples."

Official Situ was slightly teary. "Your Majesty, thank you for your kindness and for looking after me all these years. I will never forget your benevolence."

"We are all getting old. We should take a good rest." Empress Zhangsun turned around and ordered a palace maid to present silver and gold brocades. "I am giving these to you. You have raised the Crown Prince and took charge of palace etiquette all these years. It has been tough on you."

Official Situ was filled with gratitude as she gave her thanks.

At this moment, a palace maid announced that the Crown Princess was here. Official Situ could tell that Empress Zhangsun was unhappy and asked, "Your Majesty, did the Crown Princess do something wrong again?"

Empress Zhangsun sighed, “The Crown Princess always makes me worried. If only you weren’t leaving, you could help me teach her.”

Sun Lingshu entered. “Greetings, Imperial Mother.”

Empress Zhangsun became serious. “Crown Princess, do you know what is prenatal education?”

Sun Lingshu looked uncomfortable. “I...”

“It looks like you don’t.” Empress Zhangsun turned around. “Official Situ, tell her what prenatal education means.”

“Understood.” Official Situ complied. “In < <Shi Ji> > it was recorded that a mother has to take great responsibility for her behaviour as her foetus character will form in her womb. One must act with virtue when they are pregnant. One should not see evil, not hear evil nor speak any evil. The foetus can be influenced. When King Wen’s mother, from the Zhou Dynasty, was pregnant with him, she abided by various etiquette, paying great attention to prenatal education. Hence when she gave birth to King Wen, he was smart, kind and was able to gain great knowledge.”

“The Zhou Dynasty had another rule. When the Empress was pregnant, the Imperial tutor would play music and the Imperial officials would offer food. If she was unhappy during her pregnancy and she does not want to listen to appropriate music or want to eat spicy and cold food, the Imperial tutor and official would say that they did not dare to serve this to the prince.” Empress Zhangsun added as she sounded even colder, “Crown Princess, do you know what status your child will have when he is born?”

“He...” Sun Lingshu tried to be brave. “He will be the Crown Prince’s eldest son...”

Empress Zhangsun’s tone suddenly became sharp. “Since you know, how dare you behave so outrageously?”

Sun Lingshu knelt down in fright.

“If you are pregnant and want to watch a show, you should watch a refined and cultured show. Your baby sees whatever you are seeing.

Zhao Zilong's Seven Charges into Changbanpo is a noisy and violent show. Do you think your child will grow up to be kind and refined if you watch these types of shows when you're pregnant?"

Sun Lingshu argued, "Imperial Mother, I did not know..."

"It is not that you did not know but your character is as such. It is not enough for you to watch it once but you even wanted to watch it a second time. Injuring an actor is a small matter. However, will you be able to bear the responsibility if you startle the Crown Prince's child? The Sun family has a rigorous upbringing and is well-known for their literature knowledge over generations. How can they have such a reckless, arrogant and hot-tempered daughter like you?!" Every time the Empress witnessed Sun Lingshu making a mistake, she would be filled with regrets.

Sun Lingshu was extremely flustered as she crawled on her knees towards Empress Zhangsun. She hugged Empress Zhangsun's legs and begged, "Imperial Mother, please don't be angry. It's not that I was careless but there is something else going on. I have been wronged!"

Empress Zhangsun stared at her. "What have you been wronged for?"

"I have never enjoyed watching violent shows. The reason why I chose this was because I cannot take it any longer. The actor acting as Zhao Zilong has bewitched the Crown Prince and influenced him to do something unscrupulous. The Crown Prince brought him into the Eastern Palace everyday and even slept with him in the night. Their behaviour was unbearable to look at."

At the side, Official Situ's expression changed.

"What!" Empress Zhangsun slammed the table as she stood up. A wave of dizziness came across her. Luckily, Official Situ supported her in time.

"As I am from the Eastern Palace, I did not dare to say more. The rules in the Eastern Palace have always been managed by Official Situ. She should know about this too. I thought that Official Situ would report this to you. I never thought that she would allow His Highness to do as he wished." She brought Official Situ down with

her.

Empress Zhangsun turned sharply and glared at Official Situ. Official Situ immediately knelt down.

“Official Situ, I trusted you so much and let you take charge of enforcing palace rules and managing the Crown Prince. Is this how you repay me?” Empress Zhangsun was furious beyond belief. “Where is that actor that dares to seduce the Crown Prince? Bring him to me!”

“Your Majesty! This is my fault, I am willing to accept any punishment. Please resolve your anger and hear me out, Your Majesty. I have already investigated this matter. Before the Crown Prince left for Da An Palace to serve the Grand Emperor, he had already sent the actor away and cut off their relationship. This matter concerns the Crown Prince's reputation. Since they have already cut off their relationship, there is no need to bring this up anymore. If this matter spreads, it will ruin the Crown Prince's reputation!”

“So you care about the Crown Prince's reputation now? When the Crown Prince made the mistake and needed you to correct him, where were you? In order to get into his good books, you helped him to hide from me!” Empress Zhangsun yelled, “Guards! Official Situ has failed to do her duty and hid matters from her superiors. Bring her out and cane her one hundred times!”

Sun Lingshu sneered as she saw the internal attendants drag Official Situ out to punish her.

With such a big matter happening in the Eastern Palace, it was hard for it to not spread. Very soon, Concubine Yan found out about it. Prince Zhou happened to be having tea with her and she casually brought it up.

“I heard that the Crown Prince is very close to an actor. Did he anger the Crown Princess?”

Prince Zhou was not surprised. “Such a thing happened? Mother, have you been listening to rumours? The Crown Prince simply enjoys watching shows, it is no big deal.”

Concubine Yan looked at Prince Zhou and suddenly noticed the red flower embroidery on the robe that he was wearing. "Haven't you worn this many times recently?"

Prince Zhou remained composed. "That's right, I really like this robe and wore it many times."

"You like the robe? Or the person who made it?" Concubine Yan saw through him immediately. "Have you managed to give the jade pendant?"

Prince Zhou raised his brows, "I haven't found a good opportunity."

"In terms of status, you are slightly lower than the Crown Prince but you are still of royal blood. She is simply a female official. If you really like her, you should just ask for her. It is not a big matter for a prince to want a female official. Isn't it torturous to drag this on?" Concubine Yan felt bad for her son.

Prince Zhou was finally honest. "Not only is it not torturous, it is actually fun. Two parties have to be willing for a relationship to work. If she is not into me, it would be meaningless even if I force her to be with me."

Concubine Yan laughed, "You are different from your Imperial father, you are infatuated."

Prince Zhou was confident. "Mother, please do not worry. You gave birth to such a talented and outstanding son. I will definitely be able to make her like me and come to me out of her own will. With regard to Head Seamstress Fu, I hope that you will leave it to me and not interfere."

Concubine Yan nodded. She had no intentions of interfering to begin with. After all, it was not easy to move her son's heart. From the black and white lotus screen, she could tell that Fu Rou was someone that knew her place and that was enough for her.

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The Emperor was completely oblivious to the chaos at the Empress' place. All he knew was that his head hurt.

He looked at the two people kneeling in front of him. One was Sheng Xiaojing's son while the other was Lu Yunji's son. After becoming generals, if they were to work together, they would be the future of Great Tang. Unfortunately, they simply could not get along.

What happened was, Lu Qi had returned to the city after a hunt. However, he had reached back too late and the city gates were already closed. Eventually, Sheng Chumu opened the city gates for him but requested to search his body. Sheng Chumu then tied him up and left him for the mosquitoes for the entire night.

"One of you is General Xuanwei and one of you is General Zhenyong. You are both generals and officials of the country but you fought in front of the city guards. Aren't you guys embarrassed? I feel embarrassed on your behalf!"

Sheng Chumu spoke with conviction, "Your Majesty, I was appointed by you to guard the Xuanwu Gate. I am also concurrently guarding the West Gate and do not dare to make any mistakes. Lu Qi made trouble at the gates and I had no choice but to capture him."

Lu Qi fumed, "Sheng Chumu, don't push the blame on others! Your Majesty, Sheng Chumu is abusing his position and purposely made

things difficult for me. He also intentionally humiliated my younger sister and triggered me, causing me to fall into his trap. Sheng Chumu is creating something out of nothing.”

Sheng Chumu wanted to put his face right in front of the Emperor. “Your Majesty, this whip scar is not something out of nothing.”

Lu Qi replied, “I merely hit once.”

Sheng Chumu exaggerated and shouted, “You still want to hit some more? Thankfully it was me and I am strong. If it were others, you would have killed them.”

Lu Qi brandished his fist. “You...”

The Emperor massaged his temples. “Both of you shut up!” *Were they children squabbling?*

Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi lowered their heads.

“Sheng Chumu, Lu Qi mentioned that you humiliated her sister. What does he mean?” The Emperor identified the root of the problem immediately.

“I was merely stating facts. I said that his sister did not become the Crown Princess. She was then engaged with Duke Cheng’s son but he fell sick. I asked Lu Qi to help me send my greetings to his sister.” Sheng Chumu smartly changed the tone that he had used and made it sound like there was no problem.

Lu Qi glared at him from the corners of his eyes. “Did you say it like that? You said that my sister was a jinx and whoever that she is associated with will be unlucky!”

“Enough.” The Emperor changed the topic. “Lu Qi, how is Duke Cheng’s son now?”

Lu Qi immediately became respectful. “I heard that it is getting worse.”

The Emperor was smart and immediately presented medicine, asking Lu Qi to retrieve it from the Imperial Physicians. He managed to send

one away.

Thereafter, the Emperor faced the indignant Sheng Chumu. “Sheng Chumu, although you got hit once, you talked about his sister’s issue and even tied him up overnight. You two are now even. Both you and Lu Qi are court officials and should both know when to take a step back to preserve your reputations. I promoted you so that you can help me guard Chang’an, not for you to create trouble and vent your anger.”

Sheng Chumu answered monotonously. “Yes...”

“Lu Yunji had indeed gone overboard in Sheng Country and I understand that you are angry. However, for my sake, please do not find trouble with the Duke Chen Residence. In the future, I will find an opportunity to reward you as a way to compensate you.” The Emperor started off kindly.

“I do not dare to ask Your Majesty for compensation...” Sheng Chumu suddenly thought of something. *Wasn’t this the opportunity that he was looking for?* “If Your Majesty wants to reward me, I wish for a wife.”

The Emperor assumed, “Now that you have made something out of yourself, I will consider the issue with Princess Xinnan.”

“Your Majesty, that is not what I...” Sheng Chumu was startled. He did not want to fight his younger brother for his sister-in-law. Unfortunately, an internal attendant ran in to report that the Crown Prince had returned from serving the Grand Emperor.

Sheng Chumu saw that the Emperor’s expression turned for the worse and felt that it was no longer appropriate to bring up his own marriage issue. He then left obediently.

The Crown Prince entered and proceeded to report to the Emperor. “Imperial Grandfather is feeling much better now. He said that it is not good for me to be away from the Eastern Palace for too long. Since he is feeling much better, he does not need me to accompany him and asks me to return.”

The Emperor huffed, “Your Imperial Grandfather is really thoughtful of you and is afraid that you will be away from the Eastern Palace for too long. What is so bad about leaving the Eastern Palace for a while?” The Emperor would hear about whatever happens at Da An Palace between the Grand Emperor and the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince became awkward as he did not know what to say.

The Emperor smiled. “The Grand Emperor talked to you about the Xuanwu gate coup. What is your opinion on it?”

The Crown Prince’s expression changed as he immediately kneeled down. He never thought that his Imperial Father would know about the things that happen between him and the Grand Emperor. The Grand Emperor talked to him about the Xuanwu gate coup. He did not dare to judge and had no choice but to listen. He kneeled for half a day because of it. He had finally managed to return to the palace and did not want to be on his toes because of it.

“Imperial Grandfather casually mentioned it but I did not dare to listen.”

“Why not?”

The Crown Prince lowered his head. “A son should not hear his father’s past. I...”

“A son should not hear his father’s past.” The Emperor’s tone turned sharp. “So does that mean that you think the Xuanwu gate coup is my fault?”

The Crown Prince rushed to reply, “I did not mean that.”

“If that is not what you meant, then why did you not dare to listen? I put my life on the line for my country and amongst my brothers, I achieved the most outstanding war achievements. However, the Crown Prince Li Jiancheng and Prince Li Yuanji, were jealous of my achievements. They worried that my influence and power would surpass them and pushed me to my wits end. I always hoped that my siblings and I could get along harmoniously. However, Li Jiancheng and Li Yuanji went against me in every way possible and even tried

to kill me. In order to protect myself, I had no choice but to stage the coup at Xuanwu gate. Now, the country is peaceful and the citizens are happy. This goes to show that my decision was right. I never thought that my eldest son would think that my past decisions were wrong!"

His only regret was forcing his father to give up the royal throne. However, if he did not force him at that time, with the attitude that the previous Emperor had towards him, he would not have been able to escape death.

The Crown Prince was terrified. "Imperial Father, please calm down! I did not mean that!"

"Li Chengqian ah Li Chengqian, you are my eldest son. During the Xuanwu gate coup, in order to not leak any information, I only brought about eighty people initially. In the Qin Residence, when your mother heard that people from the Eastern Palace were about to attack me, she immediately asked your uncle to lead the troops from the Qin Residence to back me up. Before they set off, your mother made an effort to personally console the troops. All the troops were filled with gratitude and were willing to sacrifice their lives. After going through multiple hardships, I am finally where I am today and that is how you are where you are today. Have I not doted on you enough? Could it be that all these years of my affection, investment and teachings in you is not even worth a few sentences from the Grand Emperor? How can a few simple sentences from the Grand Emperor make you harbour suspicions and become uneasy?"

What could make him feel worse than being rejected by his own son?

The Crown Prince bowed. "Imperial Father! I was wrong! From now on, I will not dare to listen to the Grand Emperor!"

"The Grand Emperor is my father and your Imperial Grandfather. You have to listen to him. What makes my heart break is that after putting in so much effort to raise you, you do not have a firm and determined heart. You are so easily persuaded by others and do not know how to stand on my side to form a world that is ours."

The Emperor sighed, "I am tired. Please leave." At the same time, he

ordered his men to call for Prince Zhou to read to him < <The Book of Change> > .

The Crown Prince's face was solemn as he left Ganlu Palace. He was subsequently called to Lizheng Palace. He was thinking that the timing was just right and he could tell his Imperial Mother about what happened. His Imperial Mother would definitely stand up for him in front of his Imperial Father. He never would have thought that his Imperial Mother would slap him as soon as he arrived. It was only then that he knew that Sun Lingshu had complained to his Imperial Mother and said that he had been seduced by an actor. He even shared a bed with the actor and frolicked, conducting himself inappropriately. Official Situ had also been implicated as a result.

As the Crown Prince returned to the Eastern Palace after suffering two setbacks, he could not help but grind his teeth in frustration as he saw Sun Lingshu welcoming him. The best memory that this woman gave him would always be the first time they met in the Han Mansion. From then on, every day was worse than the previous.

"Aiyo, why do you have blood at the corners of your lips?" Sun Lingshu retrieved a handkerchief as she tried to help the Crown Prince wipe his lips.

The Crown Prince slapped her. "Despicable!"

Sun Lingshu fell to the ground as she was slapped. She held the side of her face as tears rolled down. She knew that the Crown Prince would be in a bad mood but never thought that he would hit her.

The Crown Prince looked at her cry, not feeling the slightest bit of emotion because she only knew how to look wronged. Without considering others, she ran her mouth and hurt him, Chen Ji and Official Situ. Yet, she acted as if she had done anything wrong and still dared to look like a victim.

The next chapter will be released on Thursday! What do you think will happen next?

The drama is up to episode 16 on its official youtube channel. Do check it out if you haven't already done so! Just type in, "Court lady

drama ep 1 eng sub" Or follow the link in the description of this novel.

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Fu Rou came to check on Official Situ, only to see her lying on the couch, her face devoid of colour. Her body was as limp as a piece of paper and looked as if she could be blown away. Fu Rou could not help but feel like crying.

“Official Situ, are you feeling better?” Fu Rou did not wish to think negatively.

“I am old and useless. I don’t think I will ever be able to see the river in my hometown.” Official Situ did not complain or hate anyone. She simply believed that this was her fate.

“Official Situ, please do not think that way. Take your time to recover, you will eventually become better.”

Fu Rou saw the Crown Prince enter and bowed wordlessly. Along with Wu Zhangyi, Fu Rou left the room.

Fu Rou asked Wu Zhangyi, “What did the Imperial Physician say?”

Wu Zhangyi shook his head and sighed, “The Imperial Physician said that this was just a matter of time. The Empress personally issued the instruction to hit her hard and those that were carrying out the punishment did not dare to hold back. Even a young and strong person won’t be able to hold out against a hundred strokes of the cane, let alone Official Situ who is already old.”

Fu Rou asked again, "Is Official Situ still unwilling to say why she got hit?"

Wu Zhangyi shook his head, indicating that Official Situ's lips were tight. However, Fu Rou guessed that this matter had something to do with the Crown Princess. On the day that Official Situ went to bid farewell to the Empress, she was exuberant when she left. She heard that the Empress was also in a good mood and rewarded Official Situ with quite a lot of things. However, the Crown Princess later entered Lizheng Palace and thereafter, the Empress punished Official Situ and she became the state she was in now.

Fu Rou thought of how Sun Lingshu had always targeted Official Situ. If Sun Lingshu had taken her revenge without taking into consideration other people's lives, she would be going overboard.

At this moment, the Crown Prince sat beside Official Situ's bed. This was the person that had raised him from young. Now she had one foot in her grave because of his mother, yet, there was nothing that he could do.

Official Situ opened her eyes and was extremely surprised. "Your Highness, why...have you come to my small residence? This is not appropriate."

The Crown Prince held back the sadness he felt. "I have come to see you."

"Her Majesty did not punish you right?" Official Situ was only concerned about the Crown Prince.

"Don't worry about me. How are you feeling?" The Crown Prince wanted to cry.

"I am afraid that I won't be able to serve you any longer. The only regret that I have is that I will not be able to see you ascend the throne and accept the bows of the citizens." This was also Official Situ's only wish.

"Don't speak so demoralizing..." The Crown Prince was choked with emotions. "I will get you the best medicine. You have to recover and

live till I ascend the throne. I will definitely punish the Crown Princess.”

“Your Highness, you must get along with the Crown Princess. Jealousy is a natural trait of every woman. Furthermore, she is also pregnant. She is your wife and you will have to live with her for your entire life. Don’t make it such that you two will never be able to get along.”

“I did not consider the overall picture. This is my fault. I implicated you.”

Official Situ’s eyes were shining with tears. “I don’t have any children. The most fortunate thing that I have was Her Majesty giving birth to you and allowing me the chance to take care of you. Your Highness is brilliant, smart and very cute. Even now as I close my eyes, I can picture your small smiling baby face. Young people tend to make mistakes. Your Highness is still young, it is okay to make a small mistake. Do not take it to heart. Don’t feel upset for an old woman like me. I am worried that after I leave, there won’t be anyone beside you that knows you well enough. Your Highness, you must take care of yourself. Do not read until too late in the night, you will harm your yuan energy. You must also watch what you eat. Do not eat too much of what you like. Otherwise, it will hurt your stomach.”

The Crown Prince nodded. “I understand. Official Situ, I remember everything that you have taught me.”

Official Situ’s voice became softer and softer. “I can’t bear to part, I can’t bear to part ah...Your Highness, even though this is not appropriate but...I wish to touch your face for the last time. Just like when you were young...”

The Crown Prince held onto Official Situ’s hand and placed them on his face. Tears fell from his eyes. A person that truly cared about him was about to die. Now he had one less.

Official Situ smiled as her breathing became shallow. Her eyes shut, never to open again.

Cries So sad. SO SAD. OMGGGGGGGG. T_T

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On this day, Fang Ziyan led his brothers from the Four Seas Sect into Chang'an. The Emperor offered them amnesty and bestowed the title of General Zhenhai onto Fang Ziyan. He granted him a relatively grand residence, worthy of a general.

“You are already here, what are you so proud about?” Although Sheng Chumu said that he would welcome him, he was not very willing and only came because of the royal decree. “You really dare to come. Aren’t you afraid that I would trick you with fake news and betray you?”

Fang Ziyan replied, “I don't trust you but I trust our Great Tang Emperor. If the Emperor goes back on his words just to catch a pirate like me, then I have no choice but to accept my fate.”

Sheng Chumu laughed. “You have only pledged your loyalty to us a few days ago and you are already saying our Great Tang Emperor. Have you done what the Emperor asked you to do?”

Fang Ziyan pointed to the prisoner chariot behind him. “I have already wiped out all the more famous pirates along that stretch of sea. In one of the carriages behind, there are heads cast in limestone. I have a few that are still alive. I will present them to His Majesty to show him what fresh pirates are like.”

Sheng Chumu felt like this was extra. “Isn’t it enough to look at you?

Why is there a need to catch them alive for the Emperor? Do you think the Emperor is very free?"

"Sheng Chumu!" A fat human plank suddenly dashed towards Sheng Chumu and hit him. Seeing how he did not budge, she nodded in satisfaction. "Not bad, you are still as strong."

Sheng Chumu pushed the person away and protected the front of his body. "Ma Hainiu, I have a wife. Don't anyhow touch me!"

"But you have already seen my body. You have to take responsibility." Ma Hainiu did not care, she had set her sights on him.

Sheng Chumu yelled, "Ah, ah. When have I seen your body?"

"You haven't seen it twice. Didn't you see clearly?" Ma Hainiu's eyes turned. "If there is a chance, I can let you take a look again."

Sheng Chumu immediately turned and left. He did not dare to provoke women but that didn't mean he could not hide from them.

Fang Ziyang held onto the reins and looked towards the crowd. He caught sight of an unforgettable beautiful face, with a pair of bright eyes that were incompatible with her family name. He remembered her name clearly, Lu Yingying.

Lu Yingying forced her way to the front of where Fang Ziyang was. She greeted him with a smile, with her face filled with excitement. "It's you!"

Fang Ziyang also smiled, exposing his white teeth. "Do you still have the pearl I gave you?"

Lu Yingying nodded happily.

"Throw it away." He stated coldly.

"Why?" She froze.

"Your father and I cannot exist under the same sky." He looked away and nudged his horse, leading the group forward.

She should be afraid. She should run as far away as possible. Because this time, he had come to make the Lu family pay the price!

Sheng Chumu sent Fang Ziyan to General Zhenhai's residence and thought that he could finally breathe a sigh of relief. He never thought that he would hear grievous news as soon as he got home. The Emperor was bestowing marriage on him with Princess Xinnan!

Sheng Chuling had finally told their parents about his relationship with Princess Xinnan and asked them to ask the Emperor to bestow marriage on them. Sheng Xiaojing and his wife had wanted Sheng Chumu to marry Princess Xinnan but Sheng Chumu was only willing to marry Fu Rou and no one else. Now that they were still able to marry Princess Xinnan into the family, it would have been perfect.

Unfortunately, while everyone thought it was perfect, heaven had other plans. When Sheng Xiaojing met with the Emperor, he only managed to mention "Xinnan" and the Emperor immediately bestowed marriage on Sheng Chumu and Princess Xinnan. He even generously gave a date to be two months later. Sheng Xiaojing had no choice but to thank His Majesty for his graciousness.

Sheng Chuling's reaction was larger than his elder brother. "How did you manage this? It is such a simple thing yet you caused such a ridiculous conclusion! Princess Xinnan's father was confused so you should have rejected it! You should have stood your ground! You can't just kneel and thank him! You have no guts! You have no pride! You have no..."

Sheng Xiaojing smacked Sheng Chuling's head. "Little brat, is this how you speak to your father? Have you gone crazy?"

Sheng Chuling was flustered as he suddenly fell to his knees. He hugged onto Sheng Xiaojing's legs and cried out loud, "Father, I know I am not as good as Elder Brother. I am not the eldest and I am also not General Xuanwu. But I am your son, I can also carry on the family name. Father, you cannot do this to me! The woman I want as my wife suddenly became my elder sister-in-law, how can I take this? Father, you are biased! You gave my wife to Elder Brother!"

Sheng Xiaojing sighed, "It is not that I gave your wife to your Elder Brother. The Emperor is the one that wants to marry his daughter off to your Elder Brother."

Madam Sheng was, however, delighted at the turn of things. "Okay, okay. Now that the Emperor has given his command, we have to listen to him. Chumu marrying Princess Xinnan is a good thing!"

Both Sheng Chumu and Sheng Chuling's eyes widened. Sheng Chuling fell to his butt on the ground. "Was I picked from the streets and brought back home to raise? I can't live anymore and you only care about Elder Brother!"

Sheng Chujun clicked his tongue and shook his head. "Second Brother, your ability to roll about and throw a tantrum impresses me."

Sheng Chuling got up and punched his younger brother. "Who is asking you to take joy in this!"

Sheng Chumu pulled Sheng Chuling behind him, forming a wall between his two brothers. Having experienced numerous obstacles to be with Fu Rou, he had now learned how to remain calm.

Sheng Xiaojing massaged his temples and bellowed, "That is enough!"

Madam Sheng sighed, "The Emperor has given his command, we cannot change the marriage."

Sheng Chumu and Sheng Chuling shouted together, "We must change it!"

Sheng Xiaojing asked, "How can we change it?"

Sheng Chuling said as a matter of fact, "Elder Brother can tell the Emperor his opinion and reject the marriage!" He looked towards Sheng Chumu. "Elder Brother, you have a way, don't you?"

Sheng Chumu gave a heroic look. "For Rou'er I have even resurrected. Rejecting a marriage is nothing!"

In the official court meeting, civil and military officials formed a patch of black as they lined up. Fang Ziyang entered to have an audience with the Emperor and receive the royal decree.

“According to the mandate of Heaven, the Emperor has a royal decree. Fang Ziyang has gone against Tang’s laws in the past. However, he is repentant and wiped out pirates in the ocean. He has made contributions to the country. Confucius has said that benevolence is one of the most important traits. He has presented the Mountain-River Embroidery, Diagram of Large Vessels and given advice on ship manufacture. He is bestowed the title of General Zhenhai. Accept the royal decree.”

Fang Ziyang accepted the royal decree. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

However, he continued to kneel. “Your Majesty, I have sinned.”

The Emperor replied, “I have already pardoned you.”

Fang Ziyang said, “I am referring to another crime, regarding my true identity. When I was young, my family was torn apart, I fell into a river and was rescued by the sect leader of the Four Seas Sect. That was how I became a pirate. I know I had nothing to be proud of when I became a pirate and did not dare to use my actual name. I then followed the surname of my godfather and changed my name. Fang Ziyang is not my actual name. Now that I have received the benevolence of Your Majesty and am pardoned of my crimes, I can finally lead an upright life. I hope that I can use my original name. It would console my parents who are now in heaven.”

The Emperor was slightly curious. “So you have such a backstory. As a son, you became a pirate and was afraid of embarrassing your parents so you changed your name. At least you know how to feel ashamed. Okay, you can use your original name. Along with your experience of being a pirate, you can throw your name, Fang Ziyang, away as well. What is your real name?”

Fang Ziyang kneeled straight as his gaze was bright and clear. “Your Majesty, my real name is Yan Zifang.”

Standing amongst the crowd, Sheng Chumu's smile faded. He remembered this name too well. Yan Zifang was the person that Fu Rou had a childhood engagement with. No wonder he wanted to steal Fu Rou away, he already had a connection long ago. He held it in till now. Yan Zifang must have been afraid that if he told him earlier, he would not have helped him out. *That brat knew him too well!*

Lu Yunji's expression changed as well. He remembered that he had ruined the Yan family over an eagle. *No wonder, he kept going against him.*

Yan Zifang finally regained his proper identity and thanked His Majesty. He got up and joined the rest of the officials. On his way back, he exchanged glances with Lu Yunji and a sneer pulled at the corners of his mouth. *Just wait. The show is about to begin.*

When Lu Yunji and his son returned home, Lu Qi burst out in anger.

"Sheng Chumu, that bastard. He must have known that Fang Ziyang is your enemy. I was right! The reason why he put his life on the line to help a despicable pirate and even coaxed His Majesty into conferring him the title of a general was all to pit himself against you."

"Even if General Zhenhai joined hands with Sheng Chumu, they are just two inexperienced brats. What threat could they possibly pose to me?" Even though Lu Yunji was slightly shocked when he realised that Fang Ziyang was Yan Zifang, he was not afraid. "Now all we need to do is make sure that Yingying's marriage goes on without a hitch. When our Lu family and the Duke Cheng's family is linked by marriage, we will become the Crown Prince's helpers."

Lu Qi said, "Sheng Chumu, that bastard! Ever since we got associated with him, our family has been unlucky. He even dares to make a joke out of Yingying and says she is a jinx. Previously, it was because she failed to become the Crown Princess. Now, if Duke Cheng's son dies from his illness, everyone will believe his nonsense and it will be difficult for Yingying to find a husband in the future."

At this moment, their housekeeper ran in. Duke Cheng had sent a messenger to deliver the good news. They had invited Master Faya to chant sutras to drive away the illness and the young master had

finally awoken. He could be saved.

Lu Yunji laughed and shouted, "Great." Heaven was still on his side.

However, Lu Yingying was staring into blank space in her room. She held the pearl that Yan Zifang gave her between two fingers. She did not understand. *Why couldn't he live under the same sky as her father?*

When the congratulatory news was told to her, it was like a bolt from the blue. Before this, she had no opinions on who she would be married off to. When she was in Guangzhou, she knew that her father had always wanted her to become the Crown Princess. Because of this, she put in a lot of effort into learning etiquette and grooming her talent, in order to repay her father for raising her. However, when she failed in the Crown Princess selection, she was secretly happy. When the son of Duke Cheng fell ill, she also breathed a sigh of relief.

There was a person, who had used a small knife to pry open an oyster and given her the most beautiful pearl on earth. It was as if he had pried open a corner of her heart and made room for himself in there. Aside from him, she could no longer let anyone else in.

Court Lady

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Once again, Prince Zhou called Fu Rou to Lingxiao Palace. She did not know what for but it was not like she could disobey him.

“Head Seamstress Fu, do you know that my younger sister, Princess Xinnan, is about to be married into Duke Lu’s family? As her brother, I am extremely happy that she is going to be married.” Prince Zhou was grinning from ear to ear as his tone changed to a mocking one, “Head Seamstress Fu, why do you look so down? Could it be that you have met an unfaithful man?”

“He is not that kind of person.” Fu Rou had heard about this but did not believe that Sheng Chumu would lie to her. She just felt like the road for the two of them to be together were filled with thorny obstacles.

“In your heart, Sheng Chumu’s is the best man on earth and he would never let you down.” Prince Zhou did not believe that anyone could change a marriage bestowed by the Emperor.

“Yes.” Fu Rou was persistent.

“Then how about we make a bet.” Prince Zhou took the opportunity. “If Sheng Chumu marries Xinnan, you will forget about him completely and choose to be with me.”

Fu Rou shook her head. “I am not betting.”

Prince Zhou incited her. “So you are just saying words but you don’t actually have faith in Sheng Chumu.”

Fu Rou emphasised every word. “I care about him. I don’t make bets on people I care about.”

Prince Zhou felt unhappy but did not want to use his status to force her. “Okay, let’s not talk about this. I have something good to give you.”

Prince Zhou beckoned her over. Fu Rou walked over and saw drawings resembling ships on the desk.

“Isn’t this interesting?” Prince Zhou saw how she was absorbed. “These are all ships from overseas. They are very different from our Great Tang’s ships. The embroidery from the Seamstress Department is always about flowers or sparrows in forests. Every month, you have to present many embroideries and all the flowers, birds, insects and fish have been sewn by your department. Don’t you need something fresh and beautiful?”

“These overseas ships have a really interesting shape...” Fu Rou turned her head and was startled that Prince Zhou was right in front of her face. Her cheek grazed his lips.

Fu Rou was extremely awkward while Prince Zhou laughed happily.

“What did you want to say?” She had an alluring scent that caused him to be addicted.

“I wanted to say that these overseas ships have a very interesting shape. Their sails are all different and the front of the ships also have different unique shapes. If we sew them, the concubines will definitely be interested.” When she talked about embroidery, she was very focused and completely forgot about the incident that just happened.

“Mmhm, I am looking forward to your new work. When you have finished embroidering them, you better not forget about me. You have to give me one.”

“Of course.” Fu Rou believed that this was only appropriate. “Your

Highness reads extensively, I did not know that you are researching overseas ships as well.”

“I am not researching them. This was given to Imperial Father by Yan Zifang.” Prince Zhou was not one to claim credit that was not his.

Fu Rou was stunned. “Your Highness, did you just say...Yan Zifang?”

Prince Zhou replied, “He is the pirate that recently pledged loyalty to us. The leader of the Four Seas Sect. Imperial Father has officially bestowed the title of General Zhenhai on him. His family was torn apart and he was forced to become a pirate. He was afraid of bringing shame to his parents and changed his name.”

“His family was torn apart and he was forced to become a pirate?” Fu Rou muttered to herself, “It was really him...”

Prince Zhou was curious. “You know him?”

Fu Rou could not help but sigh. “He is someone that I thought had died long ago.”

“Head Seamstress Fu, I have really underestimated you.” A merchant’s daughter from Guangzhou associated herself with Duke Lu’s son and even knows a pirate.

Fu Rou answered smartly, “Life is ever-changing and everything is up to fate.”

“You are right. Head Seamstress Fu’s life is much more exciting than the average girl. Maybe you will become a consort that everyone admires in the future.” Prince Zhou looked longingly at Fu Rou.

Fu Rou lowered her eyes. “I am not delusional.”

Prince Zhou was eloquent. “Things that are impossible are considered delusions. On the other hand, things that are possible are considered dreams.”

Fu Rou smiled and shook her head. She did not have such ridiculous dreams.

On the main street, carriages and people flowed constantly. The Crown Prince walked alone. He did not fit in, but he also did not stand out.

Today, his Imperial Father had scolded him once more and Prince Zhou stood out once again. At his Imperial Mother's place, he was ordered to never contact Chen Ji ever again and she did not even want to receive his greetings. The Crown Princess was extremely possessive and disappointed him time and time again. She even caused the death of Official Situ, whom he trusted and relied on the most. He had difficulty in trying to be nice to her.

In the huge palace, there was not a single person by his side to listen to his true feelings.

All of a sudden, a silhouette resembling Chen Ji appeared in front of him. The Crown Prince subconsciously quickened his footsteps. However, when the person turned around, it was not Chen Ji.

The Crown Prince was extremely disappointed as he walked blindly for a long while. When he had finally focused, he realised that he was standing in front of the small house on Luoye Alley.

The wooden door was not closed and he could clearly see into the garden. Chen Ji was practicing swordplay with Xiong Rui and was drenched in sweat.

The Crown Prince stepped in. He should at least bid farewell to his best friend.

Chen Ji was surprised and immediately kept his sword. He bowed respectfully to the Crown Prince. "Your Highness, why have you come today?"

"I have come to see you..." He was suddenly speechless. Chen Ji also did not speak.

Xiong Rui smartly headed into the house.

After a long silence, the Crown Prince spoke, "In the future, I will not

come here. I will also not call you over to sing Zhao Zilong's Seven Charges into Changbanpo. For today, let's not be uncomfortable and be like we were before. I will never get to have these kinds of days anymore."

Chen Ji suddenly became comfortable. "Okay, I want to be a traveller. When Your Highness ascends the throne, I will wander the world. When I see injustice, I will take out my sword and fight for justice. That should be considered as helping you a little to ensure peace."

The Crown Prince glanced at the house. "You were practicing with him?"

Chen Ji shrugged. "How would someone like me be able to learn from an expert? We are just trying to live."

The Crown Prince was sarcastic. "If even the teacher is average, there is no need to mention the pupil's ability. You are learning this kind of random skill and dream of going out to defend the weak? I think you will be considered lucky if you are not killed."

Chen Ji replied, "If you have skill, then you should teach me."

The Crown Prince rolled up his sleeves. "Okay, let me teach you. I will let you see what it means for a famous teacher to train a fine student."

Chen Ji drew out his sword. "Come on!"

Again and again, Chen Ji's sword was easily knocked to the ground by the Crown Prince. The two of them gave up and resorted to their bare hands. Before they started, they even put on a show. In the end, they did not even display any skill and relied completely on who had more strength and who had more tricks up his sleeve. They took turns squishing each other. Eventually, they both ran out of energy and lay on the ground with their limbs spread out. They panted happily as they gazed at the sky.

"Chen Ji, I really want to hear you sing as Zhao Zilong. I already promised Imperial Mother that I would not see you ever again. If you

don't sing for me today, I will never get to hear you sing ever again."

Chen Ji pulled himself up and took a deep breath. When he opened his mouth, he vocalized --

"In ancient times, there was a brave hero. He did not fear death nor was greedy to live..."

The Crown Prince sat up and hugged his knees. He looked intensely at Chen Ji, as if to engrave the image of him into his heart. When Chen Ji finished singing, he cheered. The Crown Prince even brought the gem-embedded dagger that he carried along with him and handed it over.

Chen Ji smiled, "It is the last day and you still want to reward me?"

The Crown Prince shook his head. "This is not a reward, this is me giving my friend a gift. I like to hunt. Every time I hunt, I will bring along this dagger. Take it. Whenever you see it, think of me, your close friend."

"A gift from a close friend. I cannot reject this. I will carry it around with me." Chen Ji took the dagger from the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince smiled and turned to leave. He knew clearly that if they continued hanging out like they did in the past, he would put Chen Ji in danger. With today's farewell, he would never see him ever again.

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In Ganlou Palace, Sheng Chumu stepped forward and knelt down. He expressed that he was incapable and was not worthy to marry the Princess. He asked the Emperor to retract his order.

The Emperor was furious. The reason why he betrothed Princess Xinnan to Sheng Chumu was because Sheng Xiaojing had always asked him for her hand. Who would have known that as soon as he agreed, they no longer wanted her. Were they looking down on his daughter?

Sheng Xiaojing knelt down alongside his son. "Your Majesty, please calm down. Our Duke Lu Residence received your generosity and the princess' hand. We are all overjoyed. The reason why Chumu is asking you to retract your marriage order is because of difficult circumstances."

Lu Qi took the chance to step on them. "Could it be that he is interested in other women? You dare to compare the royal princess to an ordinary woman and even choose the ordinary woman over the princess!? Not only are you stupid, you must be crazy. You are simply disregarding the royal family's peerless beauty. Moreover, you are not taking into account His Majesty's generosity."

Sheng Xiaojing looked at the Emperor. "Your Majesty, there is nothing of this sort. Princess Xinnan has always been my ideal

daughter-in-law. The reason why Chumu cannot accept is because...this issue is really not nice to hear. I am afraid that saying it will pollute Your Majesty's ears." *Sigh, he could not even relax during his retirement days. Because of his two sons, he had to deceive the Emperor.*

The Emperor urged, "Get to the point."

Sheng Xiaojing hesitated as he steeled his heart. "Your Majesty also knows that Chumu was a playboy in the past. He went to a lot of brothels. As a young boy, he did not know how to restrain himself and...contracted an illness."

The Emperor narrowed his eyes. He had a feeling but continued to ask, "What illness?"

"It's...it's...when couples are together they have to consummate. He has a little trouble...getting it to stand."

Lu Qi accidentally guffawed.

The Emperor froze. "There is an illness like this?" He turned to Sheng Chumu, who had been silent. "Sheng Chumu, is this true?"

Sheng Chumu gave a troubled look. "Yes. I am very embarrassed about this and have never told anyone before. Actually, part of the reason why I suddenly stop going to brothels and stop indulging myself in love affairs is because of this illness. I am extremely grateful to Your Majesty for wanting to betrothed Princess Xinnan to me. However, if I hide my own problem just to be Your Majesty's son-in-law, I will be depriving the princess from happiness. I cannot do that to the princess."

The Emperor only half-believed him. "Can't this be treated?"

Sheng Chumu was awkward. "I have secretly been visiting the physician and have taken several prescriptions. Unfortunately, as of now, it doesn't look to be improving."

The Emperor finally understood. "It's true that no one would be willing to speak of an illness like this. The fact that you can tell me this honestly proves that you are loyal to me."

Sheng Xiaojing continued, “Your Majesty, although Chumu’s illness does not seem to be improving now, it might improve in the future. If Your Majesty does not mind, Princess Xinnan could marry into our family first. With Your Majesty’s blessing, Chumu’s illness could become better...”

“It will be good if you could heal, but what if you can’t? What would happen to my daughter then? Sheng Xiaojing, have you gone muddled from wanting my daughter as your daughter-in-law? There is still two months to Princess Xinnan’s birthday, I haven’t written my decree yet. Let’s drop the topic on Princess Xinnan and Sheng Chumu.” The Emperor was unhappy.

Sheng Xiaojing dangled his head. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

Sheng Chumu had to fight back the joy he was feeling. “Thank you for understanding, Your Majesty.”

Having witnessed the entire scene, Lu Yunji spoke, “Your Majesty, Duke Lu has contributed and achieved numerous feats in his lifetime. Now that his eldest son has this illness. I feel very sorry for him. Passing on the family name is not a small issue. If I may suggest, Your Majesty should call for the Imperial Physician now to give Sheng Chumu a check up. Let’s see if it is really serious.”

Sheng Chumu objected, “Your Majesty, it is very embarrassing to speak of an illness like mine. This matter regards Princess Xinnan’s happiness and that is why I had no choice but to say it. Duke Chen clearly just does not believe me.”

Sheng Xiaojing added, “Your Majesty, I would not dare to lie to you.” *Oh my god, even if he was beaten to death, he had to finish his lie.*

“Sheng Chumu, are you feeling guilty? You are just pretending to be sick so you don’t have to marry Princess Xinnan, right?” Lu Qi felt that Sheng Chumu was resorting to tricks. He was clearly rejecting the marriage with Xinnan for Fu Rou.

The Emperor became suspicious once again. “That’s enough. Let the Imperial Physician check what illness you have. See if he will be able to heal you. I am also concerned.”

When the Imperial Physician came, he led Sheng Chumu to the side palace to check. Sheng Xiaojing was extremely flustered. Lu Yunji saw this and felt confident.

“Duke Lu, why are you so anxious? Are you feeling guilty?” *The old man was so gullible. Did he think that he could fool everyone with just words?*

Sheng Xiaojing wiped the sweat off his forehead. “I am fit and my metabolism is high. I naturally sweat a lot.”

Lu Yunji sneered, “Sweating is good, at least...it is better than bleeding. Soon we will know whether you will be sweating or bleeding.”

Sheng Chumu reappeared. His head was lowered as he raised his robe and continued to kneel.

The Imperial Physician went up to the Emperor and reported to him quietly. When the Emperor heard his report, he looked sympathetic. He waved for the Imperial Physician to leave. At the same time, he called on Sheng Xiaojing.

“As a father, I understand how you feel. Do not be too upset. There are many people in the Great Tang, there is hope for a cure.”

Sheng Xiaojing almost smiled crazily. With much difficulty, he forced himself to look sad as he lamented, “Yes, Your Majesty is brilliant. I feel much better after hearing what you said. We will slowly try to heal him. There is hope.”

Both the Lu father and son were stunned. They did not know that Yan Zifang had given Sheng Chumu a secret Persian pill with amazing effects. Moreover, Sheng Chumu would never do something he was uncertain of.

Very soon, Princess Xinnan received the news. She quickly called Fu Rou over and hugged her, jumping excitedly.

“Head Seamstress Fu, Sheng Chumu successfully rejected the

marriage!”

“Really?” The huge stone in Fu Rou’s heart settled.

“Yes! Imperial father even gave him a bunch of medicine.” At this point, Princess Xinnan paused and her gaze became sympathetic. “Head Seamstress Fu, you have to be mentally prepared...” She leaned into Fu Rou’s ear and spoke.

Fu Rou’s mouth gaped open. It took a while before she could find her own voice. “He...he really...”

“The Imperial Physician checked him. He is telling the truth.” Princess Xinnan held onto Fu Rou’s elbow as if to support her. “Head Seamstress Fu, don’t be upset. It should be treatable.”

Fu Rou was shocked that Sheng Chumu would use this kind of excuse to reject the marriage. She did not even think how it would affect her. As she understood what Princess Xinnan meant, her neck reddened.

“What is there to be upset about? Princess...Princess, you are so precious, how can you say this kind of thing.”

Princess Xinnan was in a good mood. “I am considering how close we are. Just take it as child talk.”

Fu Rou felt extremely awkward. “If you have no other instructions for me, I will take my leave!”

As Princess Xinnan looked at Fu Rou’s retreating back, she shook her head and patted her heart. “Luckily I like Chuling instead.”

Fu Rou ran all the way to the Imperial Garden before finally slowing down. Her heart was pounding and she smacked her chest to calm her breathing. *Great, Chumu successfully rejected the marriage. They have overcome another obstacle!*

“Are you crying by yourself again?” Prince Zhou approached and sounded quite excited. “Your Sheng Chumu seems to have an illness.”

“I don’t care.” Fu Rou turned around with a smile on her face. *Why*

did everyone think that she would be bothered by it?

“You don’t care?” Prince Zhou assessed her expression. He could not find any signs of deception. “But this concerns your entire life.”

“As long as he is Sheng Chumu, I don’t care if he has a thousand illnesses.” Fu Rou bowed briefly. “I will be taking my leave. I have to find a spot where I will not be disturbed so I can bask in joy.”

Prince Zhou watched her leave speechlessly. Dejected, he punched a pillar.

Chumu went all out! Now he can't get back up! Get it? XD

HAHAHAHAHA. I am so funny. (This is Grace btw. Coca is more appropriate)

Court Lady

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Lu Yingying entered the Royal Palace in a sedan. She stared blankly outside the window through the cotton screen. Duke Cheng's son had recovered. Her father was in the midst of discussing her marriage with him. Her marriage was about to be set in stone yet she could do nothing about it. Or rather, whatever she did would be useless. She only had a fierce wish in her heart, which was to meet with that person one more time!

The sedan stopped in front of the palace gates. She stepped out of the sedan and allowed the palace guards to conduct their routine checks. All of a sudden, a man wearing a general uniform walked out majestically. It was Yan Zifang.

Lu Yingying immediately rushed up to him. Yan Zifang froze but remained expressionless as he gazed at her coldly. He did not say anything.

Lu Yingying realised that the palace guards were looking at her curiously. "Can we find a quieter place? I have something to tell you."

"If you have something to say, you can just say it here." Yan Zifang's tone was unfriendly.

Lu Yingying gritted her teeth as she revealed her palm to him. Yan Zifang looked at the pearl in her hand. "Didn't I tell you to throw

this?”

“I am returning it to you.” Lu Yingying looked slightly hopeful. “Although it isn't worth much, it is still made from the flesh and blood of an oyster. You gave it to me so now I am returning it to you. It is only appropriate.”

Yan Zifang could not deny and extended his hand to take it.

“I am getting married.”

Yan Zifang chuckled, “Do you want to hear me congratulate you?”

Lu Yingying raised her hand and slapped him.

Yan Zifang did not budge. “You are very lucky. I do not hit women.” He whistled and a horse galloped to him. He jumped on the horse and grabbed the reins. Without any hesitation, he rode far into the distance.

In a split second, tears formed in Lu Yingying's eyes. However, when she turned around, her eyes were already dry. With a pale face, she entered the palace.

The Emperor summoned the Crown Prince and Prince Zhou into Ganluo Palace to study a memorial that had just been submitted. Sun Tan and Sheng Chumu were also present.

The Emperor read a section of the account and that Master Faya was cursing Empress Zhangsun. It was recorded that she was greedy for power and superficial. She also restricted teaching of the Dharma and would go to hell when she died. The Emperor was furious and asked what kind of devious monk Faya was. How dare he write such atrocious words and be disrespectful to the Empress!

The Crown Prince took the opportunity to mention that in the past, Master Faya often entered the palace. Whenever he entered, he spent a majority of his time at Concubine Yan's place to teach her about Dharma and Concubine Yan trusted him a lot.

Prince Zhou sneered, “Imperial Father, Master Faya entered the palace more than once or twice. He also visited the Palace Courtyard. Not only does he teach Mother, he also taught Concubine Xi and Concubine Hu. I heard that Imperial Mother also went to Concubine Xi’s place once and bumped into one of Master Faya’s sessions. Imperial Mother even listened for almost an hour. Moreover, Master Faya’s rumours occurred after he was banned from the palace. Why are you picking on what happened in the past? The reason why Faya can go around spreading rumours is because he has the support of many nobles. That is why he is not afraid to voice his opinions.”

Duke Cheng entered the palace at this time and heard this. He could not help but shift his eyes.

Prince Zhou glanced at Duke Cheng and was glad that he was here. “Duke Cheng just invited Master Faya over a few days ago. After that, he even sent people to deliver gold and jewels to Faya’s temple.”

Duke Cheng immediately defended himself. “Your Majesty, my son has been ill and I heard that praying would help heal him. Faya is famous, that is why I invited him. I did not know that he has been spreading wild and ridiculous rumours.”

The Crown Prince immediately said, “Imperial Father, you must investigate this clearly. Prince Zhou had a personal vengeance against Duke Cheng. He is taking his personal revenge.”

Prince Zhou rebutted, “Imperial Father, you must investigate this clearly. Duke Cheng has a good relationship with Faya and everyone knows that. I’m not the only one who is aware of this.”

The Emperor looked at Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu reported what he knew. “Your Majesty, I have heard that Duke Cheng is close with Faya.”

The Emperor snorted as he picked up another account and threw it in front of Duke Cheng. “Duke Cheng, why do you think I called you over? The Imperial Records wrote that you accepted bribes and sold official positions. I didn’t believe it initially as you have always been honest. However, seeing how generous you are with Faya, there must

be a source for your gifts.”

Duke Cheng knelt in fright as he picked up the accounts. Trembling, he flipped through it before wailing that he had been wronged.

The Crown Prince wanted to stand up for him. “Imperial Father, Duke Cheng simply...”

The Emperor scolded, “You shut up! Duke Cheng made use of my grace to deceive me and accept bribes. He colluded with the monk and is extremely disgraceful! Your mother has fallen ill and as her son, you still want to speak up for him! Has your heart been eaten by dogs? Take down my order, Monk Faya has been disgraceful and cursed his Empress. He has misled the people and shall be beheaded!”

Sun Tan, who had been quiet, suddenly burst out, “Your Majesty! The Crown Prince has been surrounded by night and he has been bewitched. His numerous actions have made me feel bad for him. I do not wish to see the Crown Prince fall any further. Your Majesty, as his father I hope you will exercise your power and get the Crown Prince back on the right track! If not, the future of Great Tang will be in trouble!”

The Crown Prince was stunned as he looked at Sun Tan. He did not understand what Sun Tan meant.

The Emperor’s gaze was icy. “What has the Crown Prince done that made you so upset?”

“The Crown Prince...he...” Sun Tan could not complete his sentence. “Not only was he bewitched by Duke Cheng, he has also been seduced by a lowly actor named Chen Ji. They have done immodest acts!”

The Emperor was shocked and anxious. “What?” He glared at the Crown Prince and shouted his name, “Li Chengqian! Speak!”

The Crown Prince was flustered as he knelt down. “Imperial Father, this has nothing to do with Chen Ji...”

As the Emperor saw how the Crown Prince immediately defended Chen Ji, he felt like this issue was undeniable. He kicked the Crown Prince. He wanted to kick him once more but Sheng Chumu kneeled down and held onto his leg.

Sun Tan quickly interrupted, “The Crown Prince is still the root of Great Tang. Your Majesty, please reprimand and guide him but not injure him.”

The Crown Prince withstood the pain and kneeled once again. “Imperial Father, I have already cut off all ties with Chen Ji and have nothing to do with him.”

The Emperor could not hit to vent his anger and redirected it. “Cut off? Seducing the Crown Prince and doing immodest acts. How can I let such a lewd man live! Crown Prince, I order you to bring me Chen Ji’s head! If not, you will no longer be the Crown Prince!” *He would not pass down the empire, which he worked so hard to obtain, to this kind of son.*

The Crown Prince stiffened as desperation flashed through his eyes.

Luoye [1] Alley. Maybe it was because of the name, the leaves fell especially early.

In the small yard, Chen Ji and Lu Yingying were facing each other. Although they did not know each other, they were fated to meet because of the Crown Prince. When Fu Rou heard that the Emperor wanted to kill Chen Ji, she begged Lu Yingying, who was about to leave the palace, to hurry and tell Chen Ji to escape.

“The Emperor wants to kill me?” Chen Ji lowered his head.

“Head Seamstress Fu happened to overhear His Majesty’s tirade and asked me to inform you. Hurry and leave.” Lu Yingying looked at the man in front of her. He had clear eyes. Even though she did not know the full story, she felt like he was not a bad person.

However, Chen Ji sat on the stone chair and shook his head while smiling. “I am not going to run away.”

Lu Yingying was confused. "Why not?" *This concerns his life!*

"The Emperor ordered the Crown Prince to kill me. If I escape, what is the Crown Prince going to do?"

"The Crown Prince is of royal descent, if he cannot complete the Imperial Decree, he will at most be punished. However, if you stay here, only death awaits you."

"I was recklessly born into this earth and lived a low life. Dying is no big deal. Thank you for rushing here to inform me. When you see Head Seamstress Fu, please help me to thank her for our friendship." Chen Ji poured himself a cup of alcohol and raised it as if to say goodbye. "To live or die is not the most important thing. The most important thing is to live according to one's wishes. You should leave."

Lu Yingying's eyes lit up. *That's right, the most important thing is to live according to one's wishes.* She liked Yan Zifang. It did not matter what Yan Zifang thought, she would not change her feelings. She turned to walk out of Chen Ji's yard and onto the path she chose for herself.

Chen Ji had no idea that his words had changed a person and continued pouring and drinking his alcohol. Soon, his yard would be dyed red. He suddenly threw the cup and started singing. Heroes were always brave, they would rather fear death than be greedy to live.

Chen Ji pulled out the dagger from his waist. Facing the direction of the Eastern Palace, "However Your Highness has treated me, will be how I repay you. I know myself--" He pierced the dagger into his heart. He chuckled, "Death!"

Some time later, the door of the small garden suddenly burst open. The Crown Prince dashed in. He knew what he wanted to do. He was going to send Chen Ji away and then beg his Imperial Father for forgiveness.

"Chen Ji, I will never let you be a discarded piece--" He stopped as he

looked at the scene in front of him in horror.

Chen Ji was kneeling upright in the middle of the yard where they had once practiced swordplay. His back was straight as a dagger stuck out from his chest. A small smile was plastered on his face and he was no longer breathing.

The Crown Prince fell onto the ground and tears misted up his eyes before drying up. His eyes were left dull and hopeless.

1. Luoye means falling leaves in Chinese

Did you guys expected this? *Cries*

Court Lady

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Sun Lingshu's knees had gone numbed.

She spent the previous night kneeling in front of the Eastern Palace, begging the Crown Prince to forgive her. Even though she was not the one that told her father about Chen Ji, she was the one that said too much to her sister. Her sister heard their parents quarreling over her and stood up for her. Her father had always been an upright person and could not hold back. In the end, they angered the Emperor. The Crown Prince only returned home in the depths of the night and threw a bloody dagger at her. He told her that Chen Ji was dead and congratulated her for getting her wish.

Today, she kneeled in front of Lizheng Palace, begging the Empress for forgiveness. The Empress refused to see her. In the Empress' eyes, she had chosen the wrong daughter-in-law and her daughter-in-law had dragged her son down with her. She thought that Sun Lingshu was ignorant and petty.

Sun Lingshu was extremely indignant as she knelt but she had no choice. She kneeled to her husband and to her mother-in-law. But none of them cared about her. All of a sudden, she felt someone kneel beside her. She turned her head only to see Consort Han.

They were both daughter-in-laws of the Royal Family and both had difficult lives. The night before, the Emperor ordered that all the

actors in Han Mansion were to be beheaded. Because of Chen Ji, everyone had been implicated. Prince Han and Consort Han could not just watch and let them die. Consort Han even came to beg for forgiveness from the Empress early in the morning.

Although Sun Lingshu and Consort Han ignored each other, they felt better knowing that they were both equally unlucky.

Empress Zhangsun was bedridden from her illness and could not stop coughing. She was angry with her two daughter-in-laws.

“One can’t give birth to children and actually introduce a despicable actor to her husband’s brother. What kind of narrow-minded mistake is this? Does she wish that the Crown Prince also not have children? The other is always petty and jealous. She doesn’t think about the Crown Prince’s future and actually asked her own father to turn Ganluo Palace upside down. How can I teach them? How?”

Wei Song thought about it before advising, “Your Majesty, the Crown Princess is still pregnant after all. If she kneels for too long, I am afraid...”

Empress Zhangsun waved. “Although the Crown Princess is in the wrong, the Crown Prince made a mistake first. It is true that she cannot kneel for long given that she is pregnant. Ask her to get up and return to the Eastern Palace. There is no need to greet me.”

“Then...” Wei Song cautiously asked, “What about Consort Han?”

Empress Zhangsun closed her eyes. Wei Song understood and headed out to convey her orders. Sun Lingshu was to return to the Eastern Palace to rest for her pregnancy. The Empress had no orders for Consort Han. Consort Han understood what Empress Zhangsun meant and continued kneeling.

When Princess Xinnan heard about what happened, she immediately went to find Empress Zhangsun. She diligently fed her Imperial Mother medicine. “Imperial Mother, when I came I saw Fourth Sister-in-law still kneeling outside.”

Empress Zhangsun sighed, she did not know what her daughter was

thinking.

“Actually, you can’t blame the issue with the actor entirely on Fourth Sister-in-law. The Han Mansion has so many servants. If Fourth Sister-in-law is blamed for every mistake made by the servants, it would be too difficult on her. Imperial Mother, you are so capable and manage the entire harem daily. However, there are still tiny accidents that happen. People drop things, palace maids break the rules. How can we blame this on you?”

Now, Empress Zhangsun understood what she meant. “Did you come here to see me or plead for Consort Han?”

“Of course I came here to see you and take care of you. However, she is still my sister-in-law. If she continues kneeling there, the palace maids who move in and out will see her. How will she still be able to carry herself as Consort Han in the future? If she looks bad, it means Fourth Brother also looks bad. If Fourth Brother looks bad, it reflects badly on Imperial Mother. I...” *If she were to marry into Consort Han’s maiden home...* “I am in a difficult position too.”

Empress Zhangsun found it strange. “You are not usually this close to her. You are behaving weirdly today and speaking up for her.”

“I am just stating my view on unfairness...” *Well, after a woman is married, she belongs to her husband’s family. Her husband’s relatives would be her relatives.*

Empress Zhangsun looked stern. “What unfairness? Who do you think has been treated unfairly?”

Princess Xinnan immediately denied. “No, no. We are a harmonious family and Imperial Mother is the kindest. When we do something wrong, you are magnanimous and always forgive us.”

“Forget it, tell Consort Han to get up. If not, Prince Han won’t look good.” Empress Zhangsun still cared about her own son.

“Thank you, Imperial Mother!” Princess Xinnan immediately stood up.

Empress Zhangsun called her back. “What’s the rush? I still have to

give her something.” She casually picked two outstanding palace maids for Consort Han to bring back with her. Empress Zhangsun wanted them to serve Prince Han.

Lu Yingying looked at General Zhenhai’s main door from a distance.

The Emperor had sent Duke Cheng and his family back to their hometown and the marriage was naturally called off. Everyone in her family looked at her miserably but she actually held onto what Chen Ji said. Life and death was not important. What was important was living according to one’s wishes. What she wanted was to let Yan Zifang know that she was not going to give up.

Yan Zifang walked out of the residence. He got on a horse and rode away. Lu Yingying chased after him. However, as soon as she exited the city, he turned a corner and disappeared.

“Strange, where is he?” Lu Yingying strayed from the built path and wandered around freely, looking for him. Yan Zifang suddenly appeared from behind a huge tree and grabbed onto Lu Yingying’s shoulder.

“Ah!” Lu Yingying was shocked. When she saw that it was Yan Zifang, she breathed a sigh of relief. “You scared me to death!”

“Why are you following me?” Yan Zifang crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes.

“When did I follow you?” *She just wanted to find a chance to talk to him.*

“Eh, I used to be a pirate and am more attentive than usual people. Ever since I left my house, you have been following me. I originally wanted to ignore you, thinking that you would give up once we leave the city. I never thought that you would follow me all the way here.” Yan Zifang did not understand. *He had already let her go once, why was she offering herself up to him?*

“My name is Lu Yingying.” Stop calling her *Eh*.

“Do you know what will happen when someone like you, a noble lady, gets kidnapped by bandits outside the city?” *Her name was not important.*

“Are you a bandit?”

“I have been for the past ten over years.”

“But you aren’t one now.”

“It doesn’t matter whether I was one. What is important is to settle things cleanly and not let others find out.”

“How big a vengeance do you have against my father?”

“A deep vengeance.”

“You have already caught me, so what are you going to do to me?”
Lu Yingying took a step forward and looked straight at him.

“Of course I am going to ruin your reputation and make Lu Yunji devastated.” Yan Zifang took a step forward and grabbed onto Lu Yingying’s waist. They were practically stuck to each other and Yan Zifang gave her a frivolous gaze.

Unexpectedly, Lu Yingying tiptoed and pecked Yan Zifang’s lips.

Yan Zifang froze and immediately pushed her away. He wiped his lips with his sleeves and blurted in embarrassment, “What are you doing?”

“Letting you have your revenge.”

Yan Zifang turned and left, thinking that she was crazy.

“Yan Zifang, didn’t you want to take revenge?” Lu Yingying shouted.

Yan Zifang turned back. “I can’t be bothered with you! You better hurry and return to the city. If something happens to you, your despicable father and brother will blame it on me.”

There is something wrong with her brain! He already told her that his

vengeance was so strong they can't live under the same sky. Did she think that just her 'sacrificing her innocence' was enough for a revenge? What a joke!

At this moment, there was someone else sacrificing his innocence. Sheng Chumu.

"This place indeed has good scenery. Although this Jasper Lake in Chang'an isn't as big as the ocean, it is turquoise and looks beautiful. It doesn't have the unpleasant smell of the sea and is really comfortable. Hey, row faster." Ma Hainiu ordered.

Sheng Chumu's face fell as he sighed repeatedly in his heart. However, he could not stop rowing.

He had gone to Yan Zifang to get the antidote for his family jewel. Who knew that that wretched Yan Zifang would ask Ma Hainiu to hand the antidote over to him. As soon as he saw Ma Hainiu, he attempted to hide but accidentally broke the bowl the antidote was in. Alas, he wasted Yan Zifang's antidote and Ma Hainiu had the only antidote left. He had no choice but to fulfil Ma Hainiu's wishes.

"I have already rowed for two hours, do you think I am a labourer?" *For his and Fu Rou's beautiful future, he would bear with it.*

"You are so muscular, what is so difficult about rowing a boat?" Ma Hainiu narrowed her eyes as she looked at Sheng Chumu's body appreciatively.

"When are you giving the antidote to me?" Sheng Chumu's ears automatically blocked out whatever he did not want to hear.

"When you complete your promise of accompanying me for ten days, I will go and ask Elder Brother for the antidote." *Whether she could get it successfully was another story.*

"I am really unlucky to meet such despicable pirates like you all." It was very likely that he would not be able to survive the next ten days.

“What pirate? We are no longer pirates? The Emperor pardoned my brother and even gave him a position. Now, Elder Brother is a proper rank eight official of the Royal Palace.”

“He is just a military officer. What is there to boast about in front of me?”

“Oi, Sheng Chumu, you better fix your attitude. If my brother hears what you say, he will be angry and who knows? Maybe he will throw the antidote into the lake.”

Sheng Chumu fumed as he rowed fiercely, causing water to splash all over Ma Hainiu’s clothes.

“Hey hey, you made my clothes wet.”

“Mmhm.” *He doesn't care!*

“You promised to accompany me for ten days. Today is just the first day and this is how you treat me? I will head back right now and feed the antidote to the pigs. You can live the rest of your life like this and don’t even think of getting married.”

“Isn’t it good that your clothes are wet?” *A man can give and take.* “I think it is nicer wet.”

“So you're into this? You should have said earlier.” Ma Hainiu suddenly stood up. Like a fish, she smoothly jumped into the lake. “Look, my clothes are all wet now. Does my figure look better now?”

“You are crazy!” Sheng Chumu quickly averted his eyes.

“Why are you so shy?” Ma Hainiu grabbed onto the side of the boat and shook it with all her might. “Come, let’s swim together.”

Sheng Chumu lost his balance and fell into the water. Ma Hainiu took the chance to hook onto his neck as she laughed out loud.

“You...” Sheng Chumu did not know where to look and eventually pushed Ma Hainiu away. “I’ve had enough!” He turned and swam to the shore.

Ma Hainiu suddenly shouted, “Eh, Sheng Chumu! Quick come!
My...my leg is cramping...”

Do you prefer shameless women or shameless men? AHAHAHAHA!

Court Lady

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As if Sheng Chumu would believe her. However, as he reached the shore, he wiped his own face and turned back to look. He could not see Ma Hainiu anywhere. He was stunned and hurriedly jumped back into the lake. He found Ma Hainiu sinking and quickly rescued her to shore.

Ma Hainiu had swallowed some water and was unconscious. Sheng Chumu hesitated before deciding to undo the button around her collar. He then leaned over to give her CPR. She coughed violently before spitting out a few mouthfuls of water and eventually opened her eyes.

Sheng Chumu sat on the ground and breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank god you did not die."

Ma Hainiu sat up and suddenly hooked her hands around Sheng Chumu's neck. "Of course I am okay. I got a kiss from you. Even if I died, I would resurrect immediately."

Sheng Chumu froze before shouting, "Wait a minute! I did that to save you."

Ma Hainiu grinned. "Since you saved me, I should repay you by giving myself to you."

Sheng Chumu shouted, "You are not allowed to give it!"

Ma Hainiu shouted back, "I don't care. I am giving myself to you."

The two of them shouted back and forth, shocking the entire lake and causing the water to ripple.

On this night, the Eastern Palace was desolated and solemn. Although the Emperor and Empress had instructed news to be sealed off, news was still able to spread. The Han Mansion no longer had an acting troupe and Duke Cheng's family suddenly moved out of Chang'an. Everyone knew that the Han Mansion was where the Crown Prince frequented.

The Crown Prince did not think that when everyone was trying to avoid the Eastern Palace, Lu Yunji would come on behalf of Duke Cheng to send a letter.

Lu Yunji spoke, "Before Duke Cheng left, he wanted to meet you but the Emperor did not let him. When he left, he reminded me over and over again to hand this letter over to Your Highness."

"Everyone that was by my side has either died or left." *The Eastern Palace was like the Cold Palace.*

"Your Highness, do not be dejected. You are still the Crown Prince. Although your circumstance is slightly difficult now, it is like the winter days that you cannot avoid. Once it passes, the sky will clear and you will be able to feel the sunshine." To Lu Yunji, this was like the light at the end of a tunnel. His chance to support the Crown Prince had finally arrived.

"Winter goes and spring comes. The four seasons rotate. In the winter, grass and trees have a chance to live once again. But how can someone that has passed live again? Chen Ji is dead, Duke Cheng is gone. I don't seem to have energy to do anything."

"Duke Cheng was unlucky. When the incident happened in Ganluo Palace, Sheng Chumu happened to be there. Prince Zhou lit a fierce fire. Sheng Chumu did not help put out the fire and even add a pot of oil. If not for him, perhaps His Majesty would not be so angry and

immediately deal with Duke Cheng.”

Lu Yunji had already started planning how he would get more and greater influence and power. He would become the court official that the Crown Prince trusts the most.

“I have never treated Sheng Chumu badly. Why would he do that?” The Crown Prince was confused.

“Sheng Chumu is Consort Han’s younger brother. Maybe this...”
Sheng Xiaojing’s backing was Prince Han. Now that Prince Han is down, let’s see how Sheng Xiaojing can act from now.

“You think there is someone else behind this?” The Crown Prince could tell that he was trying to give a hint.

“Your Highness has recently been relying on Duke Cheng a lot. Perhaps Prince Han thought that his position was being threatened?” Lu Yunji pointed out.

“We are brothers from the same mother. I am his Elder Brother, what is there not to trust?” The Crown Prince’s personality was to treat whoever treats him well. He easily believed Lu Yunji.

“I deserve death. Your Highness has always had a strong relationship with Prince Han. I must have guessed wrongly.” Since he had obtained his goal, he had to pretend.

After sending Lu Yunji off, the Crown Prince stared blankly for a long while. Eventually he said, “Men.”

An internal attendant entered to carry out his orders.

“Flatten this flower bed.” The Crown Prince’s eyes were like gaping holes. “Flatten it and build a grave. After that, make a stone tablet. Chen Ji does not have a home and I promised him before that I would build a grave for him. On this earth, at least someone will remember him.”

While the Crown Prince was building a grave for Chen Ji in the Eastern Palace, Fu Rou was burning paper offerings for Chen Ji.

All of a sudden, a wind blew from behind her. Fu Rou turned back to see Prince Zhou walk over. She ignored him as she continued throwing paper offerings into the burner.

“I did not tell the Emperor about him.” When Sun Tan mentioned it, he was also caught off guard.

“I know this has nothing to do with Your Highness.” At that time, Fu Rou was just outside the palace and knew what happened.

“Chen Ji had an unlucky fate.” Prince Zhou stated.

“No. He had the chance to escape but he chose not to.” She knew long ago that Chen Ji was different from others.

“Why?” *How could anyone be so dumb?*

“Maybe it is for someone that he thinks is important.” She took out a brand new set of clothes and threw it into the burner. “I once promised him to help him mend his shirt. I forgot about it and even lost his shirt. Later on, I promised him once again to give him a new set. I had just finished making it, but I didn’t even get the chance to give it to him before he died.”

“I never thought that there would be so many people sad over an actor.” Prince Zhou could not help but be moved.

“Those of royal descent are human, an actor is also human. No matter how high one’s status is, there will be times when they are weak and in suffering. No matter how low one’s status is, there will also be times when they are magnanimous and do things that let others admire them.” *Whether someone receives the sadness of others has nothing to do with status and has everything to do with their character.*

Smoke rose in spirals, accompanying ash up into the sky, leaving behind the noisy human life.

When Lu Qi found out that his sister had left the house alone and had yet to return when evening came, he was extremely anxious. He was

ready to head out to look for her when Lu Yingying returned.

Lu Qi rushed up to her and slowly helped her off her horse. "Where have you gone? You scared me to death!"

"I was feeling bored so I rode my horse out." Lu Yingying did not dare to tell him the truth.

"You were relaxed while you were out but I almost flipped the entire Chang'an trying to find you. Hurry and go in. Father is also worried about you." *This sister of his had been obedient when in Guangzhou, now, she has become mischievous.*

"Father is not like you. Father will definitely say, since the wedding has been cancelled, let Yingying go out if she wants. What is most important is to not hold it in and fall sick." Lu Yingying stuck out her tongue as she walked in.

Lu Qi shook his head. He could not do anything to her, she was his only sister.

Lu Yingying returned to her room and sat by the window. She could not help but stroke her own lips as her heart pounded. She could not believe that she actually dared to kiss Yan Zifang. Does Yan Zifang know how she feels now? If he knew, would anything change between him and her father?

Nanny Fan carried a tray of water in for her to wash up.

Lu Yingying needed to distract herself and asked Nanny Fan, "Tell me. If a girl kisses a guy, what does it mean?"

Nanny Fan had a look of contempt. "If they are not married, they would be an adulterous couple."

Lu Yingying touched her lips and mumbled, "We are not an adulterous couple."

Nanny Fan asked her why she kept touching her lips and she immediately lowered her hand, saying that the weather was dry. Nanny Fan wet a cloth and leaned over to dab her lips. She quickly covered her mouth.

“Don’t wipe!” She shouted from between her fingers. Nanny Fan was startled. “Why not?”

“You just can’t wipe it! Aiya, just go and sleep. I will do this myself. I don’t need you.” She chased Nanny Fan out of the room. Alone, she turned to a copper mirror and smiled at herself in a silly manner.

At that time, Lu Yingying was innocent and believed that hatred was like an ice cube. As long as she hugged it tightly enough, it would melt. It was only later on that she would realise that to Yan Zifang, hatred was a sword. If she continued to hug it and not let go, she would only hurt herself.

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The Emperor entered the Empress Palace quietly. All the palace maids and internal attendants immediately bowed to greet him. They were about to announce his arrival when he made a motion to shush them as he walked to the front of where the Empress was lying. He gazed upon her thin face and subconsciously reached out a hand to brush a few stray strands off her face.

Zhangsun was not in deep sleep and was immediately jolted awake. She smiled as she saw the Emperor and immediately made a move to get up and greet him.

The Emperor stopped her. "Lie down. Are you feeling better?"

"After seeing Your Majesty, my illness has gotten a lot better." Zhangsun still insisted on sitting up. "My body is sore from lying down for too long. I want to sit up and talk to you."

The Emperor personally helped her up. "Why is only Wei Song here to serve you? Where is Prince Han, Prince Qin and Xinnan? The Crown Prince is the worst. His own mother has fallen ill, yet he is not here to serve you?"

"The Crown Prince has been here numerous times. I am the one that asked him to leave. When I see him, I think of how he made you angry and his presence irritates me. If Your Majesty does not want to forgive him, I will also not forgive him."

The Emperor sighed, "The Crown Prince has really made a mistake this time."

Zhangsun replied, "I heard that Sun Tan was the one that told you about Chen Ji."

"Empress, you cannot blame Sun Tan. What he did was right." The Emperor believed that as the one leading the country, he had to be wise and let his subjects speak honestly.

"I do not blame Sun Tan. Similar to Your Majesty, I am thankful for Sun Tan. He is the Crown Prince's father-in-law, why would he hurt the Crown Prince? When the younger generation makes a mistake, it is the older generation that feels the pain and wishes to hit him so that the pain will wake him. Sun Tan reported the issue with Chen Ji to Your Majesty so that you would reprimand the Crown Prince like any father would to their son. Sun Tan does this only because he sees the Crown Prince as his own family." Zhangsun spoke sincerely.

"You think the same way as I do." The Emperor was comforted.

Empress Zhangsun looked at the Emperor's expression. "Then the Crown Prince...what does Your Majesty intend..."

"I don't intend to do anything. Chengqian is after all, our eldest son. He has always abided by the rules and is outstanding in every way. He was simply bewitched this time. Young people are curious and may meet with unhealthy influences. It is normal for them to momentarily be led astray. I won't think of changing the country's future leader just because of a small mistake that he made." Things that he said in a fit of anger shall just be like the passing wind.

Empress Zhangsun breathed a sigh of relief. "Your Majesty is sincerely compassionate about the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince will understand your intentions. You can't really blame the Crown Prince. I heard that while the Crown Princess is pregnant, she is unable to attend to the Crown Prince, yet she doesn't allow the Crown Prince to go near any other women in the Eastern Palace. The Crown Prince must be very lonely."

The Emperor frowned. "Sun Tan's daughter is actually so jealous?"

“She is a pregnant woman after all. Let her be for now. After she gives birth, I will teach her properly and make sure she knows how to be a proper wife.” *Only her daughter-in-law could make mistakes, not her son. Especially not her Crown Prince.*

“Actually, now that I think about it, it is also my fault that the Crown Prince made a mistake. I have been too busy handling matters regarding the country and have neglected his education.”

“Yes, I was about to bring this up to Your Majesty. The Crown Prince should have a few more honest and frank officials with him.”

“After the Imperial Examination ends, I will help him choose a few to really help him.”

“On behalf of the Crown Prince, thank you Your Majesty.”

“If you want to thank me, you should quickly get better. I cannot do without my Empress.”

Empress Zhangsun sunk into the Emperor’s embrace. Now, everything was good. The wave had finally passed.

After looking through numerous lists of names, Du Ning still failed to find his name and sighed internally. His dreams of marrying a Fu Yin was dashed.

Those that passed all felt pity for him. They all knew that he never held back when he wrote and guessed that he had probably touched one of the examiner’s nerves. Hence, his literary talent had gone to waste.

All of a sudden, a horse galloped over quickly. An internal attendant jumped off and took a roll from his sleeve. He pasted this list over the one on the board, changing the list. This time, Du Ning’s name was on it and he actually achieved the highest grade.

Du Ning did not know the examiners had graded his examination slip as the lowest grade, but his teacher, Zhan Xuanzhi, had retrieved it and narrated it personally to the Emperor. The Emperor looked

highly upon his boldness in his writing and changed his grade to the highest one, adding it to the Hanlin Imperial Academy. However, to Du Ning, Fu Yin's smile was more exciting than seeing his name on the golden list and getting everyone's congratulations.

On this day, the Emperor signalled Du Ning, a new talent, out to walk in the Imperial Garden along with the Crown Prince and Prince Han. His spirits were high as he liked Du Ning's answers. However, he noticed that the Crown Prince kept yawning and frowned.

Prince Han could sense this and tried to draw his attention away. "Imperial Father, managing the country will never be my duty. However, I plan to listen to Imperial Father and cultivate myself."

The Emperor was curious. "Oh? How do you intend to cultivate yourself?"

"Imperial Father, you know me. With my fat body, I can hardly ride and shoot. I like literature and calligraphy the most. Of course, I will be reading more to cultivate myself and learning from the scholars."

The Emperor smiled. "It is good that you can think this way."

"I also want to write a book. Recently, I have read < < Hanshu Geography > > and Gu Yewang's < < Land Maps > > and I was enlightened. Our Great Tang has three hundred and fifty-eight islands. We are a grand country yet there isn't a complete book of our land. I hope to create a book depicting the geography of our Great Tang and record every island...no, not every island, but I want to detail and record even the county, their look, names, mountains, cities, historic interest and even the major events that have occurred."

"No wonder you are my son! When you finally finish the book, you must let me read it."

"However, with just me alone, I won't be able to do it. I need a few talented people. I am worried that just using my title as Prince Han to gather talent will cause the Imperial Censor to write and impeach me

for privately gathering talent. I will not be able to bear this crime.”

“Since you dare to bring this up in front of me, I can see that you do not harbour ill-intentions and have nothing to hide. Okay, I will free you from worries. Prince Han, heed my decree.”

Prince Han kneeled.

“I permit you to leave your prefecture and set up a literature school to gather students.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty!”

Everyone’s expression was delighted. Only the Crown Prince lifted his hand to cover his mouth as he yawned. The Emperor could not stand it anymore and looked annoyed. “Crown Prince, if you are tired, you can return to the Eastern Palace first.”

The Crown Prince was stunned. “Imperial Father, I wish to accompany Imperial Father...”

“I have so many people accompanying me, you won’t make a difference. You can leave.” The Emperor was extremely disappointed in him.

The Crown Prince left dejectedly.

After strolling through the Imperial Garden, the Emperor headed straight to Lizheng Palace, intending to ask the Empress to remind the Crown Prince not to be dispirited. However, the palace was quiet and only Wei Song came out to greet him.

The Emperor was concerned. “Is the Empress feeling better?”

Wei Song replied, “Her Majesty has been sleeping a lot better and her coughing has reduced. She is currently sleeping soundly.”

The Emperor did not want to disrupt the Empress and turned to leave. All of a sudden, he saw the Crown Prince curled up on the couch by the side of the window. He was also asleep, and looked extremely exhausted.

Wei Song explained, “Your Majesty, for the past few days, His Highness has been handling the official matters given to him by Your Majesty. In his spare time, he stayed at Lizheng Palace and put his all into serving Her Majesty. Her Majesty asked him to return but he did not want to. He has hardly slept and ate. Look how skinny he has become.”

Warmth appeared in the Emperor’s eyes and he walked over to help cover the Crown Prince with a blanket. No wonder the Crown Prince kept yawning. He had misunderstood him.

Court Lady

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In front of the palace, a pair of cocks were cock-fighting, no, bickering.

“Yan Zifang, what are you doing here?” Sheng Chumu became guarded.

“I am waiting for my fiancée.” Yan Zifang’s lips twitched. Sheng Chumu was not the only one that knew that Fu Rou could leave the palace today.

“Hey hey, leader of the pirates, let me remind you again that Fu Rou is not your fiancée. Your childhood betrothal has ended the moment you fell into the river.”

“I fell into the river but I did not die.”

“You should take it as you have died.”

“Then why don’t you take it as you have died after you fell into the ocean after being chased by rebel troops? If I knew, I would not have rescued you and you would have truly died.”

“Not rescue me? If you didn’t rescue me, Yan Zifang, will you...hey! Stay there!”

Yan Zifang did not want to listen to Sheng Chumu any longer because

Fu Rou had come out. He retrieved the Pendant of Longevity and handed it over to her quietly.

Fu Rou was stunned. “Yan Zifang...” *What should she say?*

Sheng Chumu shoved Yan Zifang away and smiled at Fu Rou. “Rou’er, I am here to pick you. He is just taking a stroll.”

Yan Zifang shoved Sheng Chumu away. “Rou’er, now you should know who I am.”

Sheng Chumu protested, “Is Rou’er for you to call?”

Fu Rou looked at Yan Zifang calmly. “Why didn’t you tell me when we met before?”

Yan Zifang opened his mouth, ready to speak.

Sheng Chumu cut him off, “Because he is a shameful pirate. If he acknowledged you, won’t that mean to push you down the fire too?” He patted Yan Zifang’s shoulder and spoke in admiration, “Yan Zifang, you were really like a man when you did that back then. Please continue to be one.”

Yan Zifang kept his gaze on Fu Rou. “After all these years, we finally met. Are you only interested in finding out why I did not tell you my real identity? Aren’t there other things you want to know?”

“No.” Sheng Chumu rushed to answer. Fu Rou, however, did not want others to reply on her behalf. “Yan Zifang, I want to say...”

“Say what?” Yan Zifang and Sheng Chumu asked together.

Fu Rou threw Sheng Chumu a look as she turned to look at Yan Zifang seriously. “I am very thankful to you for saving Sheng Chumu.”

Sheng Chumu burst out a laugh. “Yan Zifang, did you hear that? If you are a man then you should back off generously. There are plenty more fishes in the sea. You are a general, so you won’t need to worry about not having a wife. Rou’er, let’s go. I found a very beautiful lake for us to go to today. We can row a boat and swim and even...”

Yan Zifang grabbed onto Fu Rou's hand. Sheng Chumu glared. "If you continue acting like this, I am going to get angry."

"It is rare for Rou'er to have a day off, let me accompany her." Yan Zifang was not afraid.

"What gives you the right? Sheng Chumu thought that it was ridiculous.

Yan Zifang took out the Pendant of Longevity. "Based on this betrothal gift."

"This Pendant of Longevity is like you, it is turning rusty. Can you not use something from ten years ago against someone? Look, this, this and this is all new. Rou'er made all of this for me. This is called *feelings*. Do you understand?" Sheng Chumu turned around. He showed off all the small trinkets he carried and even took out his fan to boast.

Yan Zifang pulled on the cloak he was wearing. "She also made me this."

Sheng Chumu sighed, "Rou'er, why did you make him a cloak?"

Yan Zifang proudly smiled. "Because I kissed her."

Sheng Chumu had a look of disbelief.

"What a coincidence? I kissed her too." Prince Zhou walked out of the palace and assessed Sheng Chumu and Yan Zifang. He did not expect to have two love rivals.

Sheng Chumu was in utter disbelief. "Who are you?" Yan Zifang did not recognise Prince Zhou.

"I have no reason to lie. She even personally helped me make a set of clothes. It is the set that I am wearing now. This is your handiwork right, Rou'er?"

"Rou'er, you not only helped Yan Zifang make a cloak, you also made clothes for Prince Zhou? No! That is not the main point. The main point is...they really kissed you before?"

“He is Prince Zhou? The Emperor’s son?”

“I...” Three pairs, six eyes were all looking at her. Fu Rou had no words to say.

“Say something! Don’t hesitate, just tell him directly. You don’t want Sheng Chumu, I want him!” A fifth person had appeared!

Sheng Chumu turned back as he cursed in his heart. “Ma Hainiu, how did you chase me all the way here? I have important things to do, don’t come and create trouble.”

“This is not creating trouble, this is called *handing over*.” Ma Hainiu grinned as she ran over and assessed Fu Rou. “So you are the one that Sheng Chumu always calls his wife? If you are someone’s wife, how can you keep hanging out with other guys? That’s messed up. On behalf of Sheng Chumu, let me teach you a lesson.”

“Rou’er, I have nothing to do with her.” Sheng Chumu was only worried about Fu Rou’s reaction.

“You don’t have to feel guilty for kissing other men, I have also kissed Sheng Chumu before.” Ma Hainiu was extremely frank. “The lake that he said he wants to bring you to is where we went a few days ago to row a boat. He kissed me on the grass and even pulled open my shirt.”

Prince Zhou was delighted. “Shanzhai [\[1\]](#). Do not look at what is contrary to propriety and do not listen to what is contrary to propriety.”

Yan Zifang took charge of distributing. “Ma Hainiu, Rou’er is mine and Sheng Chumu is yours.”

“Rou’er, I am innocent. This female pirate literally forced herself on me. I clearly did not...” Sheng Chumu turned, only to notice that Rou’er had walked far away. “Rou’er! Rou’er!”

Sheng Chumu was about to chase after her when Yan Zifang grabbed ahold of him.

“I haven’t settled the score with you! How dare you ask my Rou’er to

make you a cloak? You even dare to kiss my Rou'er? I'm going to punch you, you ungrateful bastard!" Sheng Chumu punched Yan Zifang in the face.

Yan Zifang did not hesitate to throw him a punch in return.

Prince Zhou watched on happily as he fanned himself. Who knew that as Sheng Chumu and Yan Zifang beat each other up, they did not forget about him and each threw him a punch at the same time. Prince Zhou could not look weak as he joined the fight. It turned into a messy fight between three men.

Meanwhile, Fu Rou returned home alone and ate a reunion meal with her family. She talked about interesting things in the palace and was enjoying herself. After the meal, Fu Yin dragged Fu Rou into the house to chat.

Fu Rou smiled, "What do you have to say that you cannot say in front of everyone and have to hide in here to tell me?"

Fu Yin took out the two bracelets her mother left for her as dowry. "Second Sister, help me put them on."

Fu Rou helped her put on the bracelets. "Third Madam left these for you when you get married! Has Du Ning asked for marriage?"

Fu Yin flushed. As soon as the list was released, Du Ning came to tell her that he had already informed his parents and very soon a matchmaker would come to visit her. He told her to be prepared to become his wife.

Fu Rou was happy. "That is great. What did he say?"

Fu Yin was embarrassed. "He passed the examination and was chosen by the Emperor to the Imperial Hanlin Academy. Although it is not a high-ranking position, it is similar to what Mother wished before. I can marry an official. Du Ning said that he was going to bring this up to his parents before calling for a matchmaker to meet Father."

Fu Rou suddenly thought of Third Madam and tears streamed down

her face uncontrollably. Fu Yin also started to cry.

Fu Rou wiped her tears along with Fu Yin's. "Okay, it is a happy event, let's not cry. I will help you make the most beautiful wedding dress on earth."

"Second Sister, how could your dress not be nicer than mine when you get married to Brother Chumu?" Fu Yin joked.

"Who said that I was going to marry him?" Fu Rou scrunched up her nose. "He is always creating trouble, even today."

"What trouble?" Fu Yin was curious.

"Let's not care about him, let him settle it himself." Fu Rou recalled the mess that happened in front of the palace today and wanted to laugh. "Come, let me help you comb your hair. This is the most popular hairstyle in the palace right now."

Fu Yin found it weird. "There is no need. It is already so late."

Fu Rou acted mysterious. "Later on, Chumu will be bringing a guest."

Sheng Chumu had mentioned that Fu Tao had followed Lu Yunji to Chang'an and was staying at a camp outside the city. Today, Fu Tao was lucky to also have half a day of leave and will enter the city when it gets dark to stay the night. Fu Rou couldn't wait to see him again.

1. What monks say before they usually respond with something philosophical

This chapter was pretty hilarious. Don't you agree? It's nice how we have some lighter chapters from time to time.

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Fu Rou did not expect the Emperor to find out about the fight between Sheng Chumu, Yan Zifang and Prince Zhou. They were reprimanded harshly. Thankfully, Ma Hainiu was present and the Emperor assumed that she was the start of the fight and did not investigate the matter further. However, as a result of this, Fu Rou had already returned to the palace by the time Sheng Chumu brought Fu Tao to meet the Fu family.

The Fu family was pleasantly surprised yet feel a slight sorrow when Fu Tao returned safely. After all, Third Madam was no longer around and their family could never be reunited again. They were lucky that they did not lose anyone else. Fu Tao's biggest regret was not being able to send his mother off on her last journey. He could only cry in front of her memorial tablet as he kowtowed and offered incense. When the dead is in their final place, those that live on could only continue on their days.

After doing everything he had to do, Fu Tao was about to leave. Fu Yin chased after him, stopping him in the garden.

"Third Brother, why do you have to leave? Can't you stay? I... I may..." She was going to be married soon.

"I can't stay because I have something very important to do. Also, do not tell anyone that I came back to see you all." He could not let his

identity be known.

Fu Yin found it weird. “Why?”

“I am currently working in Lu Yunji’s army and took on the name Xi Tao. If the Lu father and son knows my true identity, it will not be good for me.”

“Lu Yunji?” Fu Yin was shocked. “Isn’t that Brother Chumu’s enemy? Why are you working for Brother Chumu’s enemy?”

Grief and indignance appeared on Fu Tao’s face. “The Lu family is not only Sheng Chumu’s enemy. They are also our enemy.”

“I don’t understand.” Fu Yin shook her head. “Third Brother, what are you saying?”

Fu Tao became serious. “Younger Sister, listen to me. The Lu family was the one that started the fire that killed our mother.”

Fu Yin’s eyes widened. “What! Do you mean that the Lu family were the ones that plotted for the huge fire to happen? But, why?”

“I don’t know. That is why I am investigating. If it is true, I want the Lu family to pay with their lives.” *He will do whatever it takes.*

Fu Yin bit her lips tightly before saying, “I also want to seek revenge for Mother.”

Fu Tao patted Fu Yin’s head. “Younger Sister, leave the revenge to me. You should be filial to Father, First and Second Madam. We can reunite after I have taken revenge.”

Fu Yin felt like a mess. “What if they realise that you are there to take revenge?”

“I have thought of it.” Fu Tao was not afraid. “If I get found out, I will just deal with them at all costs. Killing one won’t be enough. Killing two is the plan. If I can kill Lu Yunji, I would be satisfied.”

Fu Yin cried out, “No, I already don’t have a mother, I cannot lose you, Third Brother...”

Fu Tao grabbed onto his sleeves as he clumsily helped Fu Yin to wipe her tears. "Don't cry, your beautiful face is turning blotchy like a calico cat. I am just saying it but it won't be easy for them to figure it out. Moreover, my teacher is still helping me."

"Third Brother..." Fu Yin grabbed tightly onto Fu Tao's sleeves. Fu Tao carefully removed Fu Yin's hand. "I promise that I will be back."

Fu Yin's tears caused her vision to blur as she stood under the tree in a daze. The door to the garden opened and closed once again. Fu Tao was gone. She could not help but think back to the past when she had always disliked her mother for being petty. Before her mother died, her mother even asked her second sister to bring out her dowry so as to ensure that she would not marry in shame. She understood her mother's love for her. She had always felt terrible for misunderstanding her mother and not being a considerate daughter. Now that she knew the truth, she was determined.

She wiped her eyes dry as she looked briefly at her bracelets. Eventually she took them off. She could not allow herself to live in happiness while her third brother risked his life. She could not keep hiding under her sister's wings and enjoy an easy life. *Sorry, Du Ning.*

In the cold and lonely Eastern Palace, it was like the night would never end.

Although the candlelight was bright, it could not shine into the hole in Sun Lingshu's heart. She was numb as she took down her hairdo. All of a sudden, she saw the Crown Prince enter. Her face immediately lit up as she rushed to stand in front of him. He was here. Like every other time they quarrelled, he would always come to tell her that he would treat her better. However, what greeted her was a bone-piercing chill.

The Crown Prince did not even glance at her and walked right past her. He opened her cupboard and started to look for something. Sun Lingshu walked to stand beside the Crown Prince as she forced a smile, "Your Highness, what are you looking for? Let me help you."

The Crown Prince did not look up. "I want you to help me find Chen Ji. Can you find him for me?" He then took out a purple robe from her cupboard and turned to leave.

Sun Lingshu stood stunned for a while before stumbling to chase after him. She followed behind the Crown Prince and saw him stand in front of Chen Ji's grave. He covered the grave with the robe and sat on a random spot on the ground.

"It is cold at night, I brought an extra robe for you. This is not a reward, I am giving you this as a friend. You just have to thank me, you don't have to bow."

"When you were alive, you were so noisy, I feel like if I don't come and talk to you often, you will not be able to take it. You might even scold me in your grace. What a pity you can no longer play chess with me. However, with your lousy abilities, you are so far from me and I beat you all the time. There isn't much point."

"Today, at Ganluo Palace, Imperial Father spoke a lot to me. I know that he is trying. He said that he has high hopes for me that is why he gave me the name, Chengqian. Actually, I know all of this. I am aware. But just because this is the royal family, relationships change. One has to live with caution. If not, one would not even be able to survive and the people that kill you are the ones closest to you. As I look at Imperial Father's kind face, I am actually scared to death!"

"I saw that Imperial Father was in a good mood and wanted to plead on your behalf to change your surname. However, as soon as I mentioned it, he said that you had to die. Not because of what had happened but because I am the Crown Prince. Not only can power kill someone, status can also kill. Chen Ji, if you knew that you had died because of something like status, would you find it laughable? I want to laugh but...I can't."

Sun Lingshu stared dumbly at the Crown Prince's back. He could talk to a coffin for the entire night but was not even willing to glance at her. When Chen Ji was alive, the Crown Prince would still occasionally accompany her even if it was a short period. She had once thought that without Chen Ji, the Crown Prince would spend all his time with her. She never thought it would be the opposite. Now,

she was equivalent to air in the Crown Prince's eyes.

Shuangxi consoled herself by saying that once her child was born, the Crown Prince would become a father and everything would be better.

Sun Lingshu could no longer bring herself to hope. However, it was at least a reason for her to continue surviving. She believed that heaven would not be so cruel as to never give her a good day.

On this fine day, the atmosphere at Lizheng Palace was light and happy because Empress Zhangsun was much better. She could even stand up to walk around.

Wei Song smiled, "It is all thanks to the Crown Prince. He served you medicine attentively for days and nights. We are moved by his filial piety."

Empress Zhangsun's heart ached. "It is all because of you all. I said to ask him to go back and rest, why didn't you do as I said? We cannot let him fall ill because of this."

"The Crown Prince was not willing to leave and we could not do anything about it. After that, it was only because the Emperor ordered him to return to the Eastern Palace to rest and the Crown Prince could not disobey. Oh right, yesterday night, the Emperor asked the Crown Prince to stay at Ganluo Palace and talked to him for a long time. They talked happily and when the Crown Prince left Ganluo Palace, there were tears in his eyes. This morning, the Emperor bestowed numerous gifts on the Crown Prince."

Empress Zhangsun was finally reassured. "Hearing this is better than any medicine."

Wei Song replied, "Everything is great now. Your Majesty is getting better and is blessed with good fortune. There is nothing that can bring Your Majesty down. Even if occasionally bad things happen, misfortune will turn into blessing."

"Now that I am better, it is like you drank one kilogram of honey. You can't stop saying things to make me happy."

"I am merely stating facts. Look, Your Majesty got better and auspicious signs are appearing in the palace."

Empress Zhangsun got excited. "What auspicious signs?"

"A locust tree near Huayin Palace recently welcomed a pair of white magpies. They built a nest and made lovely calls as if they were singing."

The Emperor suddenly entered and smiled, "Something like that actually happened? Empress, let's go have a walk and take a look at this auspicious sign. Maybe it will help remedy the root of your illness."

As soon as Empress Zhangsun caught sight of the Emperor, her eyes turned into a smile and she looked like a young shy girl.

It was rare for the royal couple to stroll the gardens together. Their entire entourage was majestic as they quickly reached Huayin Palace. They could see the locust tree. However, everyone heard bird cries and saw Li Baolin holding a bamboo pole as she hit the nest on the tree. She scared off the two magpies and the nest fell to the ground.

Empress Zhangsun's expression soured as the Emperor raged at Li Baolin, "What are you doing?"

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Li Baolin turned around and was frightened by the huge entourage. She immediately kneeled. “Y-your Concubine thought that they were noisy and wanted to chase them away...”

The Emperor bellowed, “Are you going to chase anybody that is noisy out of the palace? These white magpies are a rare auspicious sign. The Empress just got better and you are not happy that is why you wanted to get rid of them? To ruin an auspicious sign is to curse Great Tang. You are vicious and deserve to be punished! Men!”

“Your Majesty, please allow me to speak.” Fu Rou walked up and kneeled in front of the Emperor and Empress. Fu Rou had visited Li Baolin to chat and the white magpies were making too much noise. Li Baolin then thought to chase them away.

“Head Seamstress Fu, I know that the Empress has always doted on you. Are you going to plead for someone that destroys an auspicious sign and curses our Great Tang?”

“I do not dare. I simply think that the auspicious sign is not very significant and there is no need for Your Majesty to get angry over this.”

“What did you say?” The Emperor’s tone immediately turned sour. “The auspicious sign is not significant?”

“Head Seamstress Fu, I know that Li Baolin used to be the head seamstress of the Seamstress Department and you both have a good relationship. However, you should not interfere with the matter today. Please step down.” Empress Zhangsun was afraid that Fu Rou would be implicated.

“If I may be so bold as to ask, why have all Emperors been so concerned about auspicious signs? It is not just because they are rare, right?” Fu Rou knew that as soon as she backed down, Li Baolin’s life would be at stake.

The Emperor replied, “An auspicious sign signals that the heavens are pleased with how the Emperor is ruling. It also signifies that the world is peaceful and the citizens are happy. That is why it is precious.”

“It also means that the citizens are well to do and the oceans are peaceful. So even if there isn’t an auspicious sign, it would not affect Your Majesty’s ability to become an enlightened ruler like Emperor Yaoshun. On the contrary, if a rare auspicious sign were to appear but the citizens are suffering from cold and the harshness of life, the auspicious sign would not be able to protect the ruler from negative criticism. During the Wei period of the Northern Dynasty, they found two massive trees growing together as one. The tree even had a pair of unique looking snow-white pheasants. At that time, the people thought that it was a huge auspicious sign. However, thereafter the world was at unrest and people were starving. The officials then burned the tree and cooked the pheasants to eat. Your Majesty, can this tree and the snow-white pheasant then be seen as a symbol of prosperity?”

The Emperor calmed down as his expression softened. “I didn’t know that as a seamstress, you would be so well-read.”

“Reading is to understand logic. I am simply an insignificant female official but I also wish to do my duty as a subordinate. I do not wish for Your Majesty to harshly punish Li Baolin in a rage and spoil your reputation. Li Baolin has indeed been careless and rash to chase away the white magpies, but she does not have any other intentions. Her actions must definitely not be linked to a huge crime such as cursing Great Tang. A wealthy nation and satisfied citizens are the true

auspicious signs, not two small white magpies. The talent that Your Majesty desires is the auspicious sign that Your Majesty needs.”

“The white magpies are not an auspicious sign. The talent that I desire is the auspicious sign I need.” The Emperor repeated her words before smiling. “Li Baolin has indeed been careless. Reduce Li Baolin’s allowance by half for three months.”

Li Baolin felt a weight lift off her. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

The Emperor then continued, “Head Seamstress Fu, you are well-read. It is a pity you are in the Seamstress Department.”

Empress Zhangsun added, “Your Majesty really said exactly what I feel. Head Seamstress Fu speaks well and loves to read. I have always wanted her to serve in Lizheng Palace. I am only worried that everyone will be sad to part with her talent in embroidery. My various sisters in the other palaces will not want me to take her away.”

“If you want a female official, who dares to say no? If anyone objects, tell them to come and speak to me. Head Seamstress Fu, from today onwards, you are no longer a seamstress. Go to Lizheng Palace. You can be...” The Emperor looked to the Empress for what she wanted.

“You can be my Siyan [1]. What does your Majesty think?” Empress Zhangsun’s virtuousness was not just a rumour.

The Emperor looked at Fu Rou. “From now on, you shall be Fu Siyan. This position is not a small matter. You will have to stay by the Empress’ side to help submit and announce Imperial Decrees. Fu Siyan, you have to work with caution.”

Fu Rou gracefully accepted the position. She was surprised. She had thought that her bold actions would cause her to be reprimanded. Everyone said that the palace was scary so they refrain from speaking the truth. The palace hence turned into “Deep Palace”. However, the Emperor is wise. As long as one speaks logically, there would be light.

The Crown Prince returned to the Eastern Palace and saw Prince Han waiting for him. Prince Han was reading a book, looking plump and simple like he had always been. The Crown Prince did not seem to detect the joy in his brother's eyes and asked monotonously why Prince Han had come.

Prince Han did not sense the difference in his brother's expression. "Did you forget that you scheduled a hunt with me today? I didn't see you so I came over to see what was going on."

"Oh, it is my fault. People from Da An Palace came to say that the Grand Emperor has fallen sick, so I rushed over to attend to him and forgot about our meeting."

"The Grand Emperor is sick? Is it serious?" Prince Han was slightly scared of the Grand Emperor. If the Grand Emperor did not summon him, he would not dare to go over.

The Crown Prince looked at his brother and thought of how the Grand Emperor mentioned Prince Han's Literature School when he was lying in bed today. Back then, when his Imperial Father was still Prince Qin, he set up Tiance Mansion. They used different methods to achieve the same results of recruiting talent. Previously, Lu Yunji had warned him, now with the Grand Emperor saying the same thing, he could not help but be concerned.

The Crown Prince brushed him off. "He has caught a slight cold. The Imperial Physician has seen him and prescribed medicine. He had taken the medicine and gone to sleep. The Grand Emperor is old and doesn't have as much energy. His mind is unclear and said a few nonsensical things."

Prince Han finally understood. "It is good that there is nothing serious. Let's go and hunt."

"Let's not hunt, I am tired."

"That is true. You just took care of the Grand Emperor. How about we drink and chat?"

"Today, I..."

"Come on, Crown Prince. We haven't drank and talked for a while now. I have a bunch of things I want to tell you." Prince Han pulled on him enthusiastically.

The Crown Prince could not argue over him and could only give in.

As they drank, Prince Han kept talking about his Literature School. Just as the Crown Prince was getting irritated, Shuangxi brought lotus seed soup over. The Crown Prince immediately flipped and sent both Shuangxi and the lotus seed soup away.

"Crown Prince, are you still..." Prince Han could tell that something was wrong.

"Don't mention her." The Crown Prince was frustrated.

"Even if others don't want to speak about it, I cannot do the same. I don't wish to hide from you but even Imperial Mother has noticed the indifference in the Eastern Palace. Imperial Mother even called me over to Lizheng Palace and asked me to persuade you. I was thinking that as a younger brother, it is not my place to talk about your relationship with the Crown Princess. However, after I thought about it, you are my dear brother and if I don't say it, who else will? Therefore, I am going to be thick-skinned and say it."

As the Crown Prince heard him say "dear brother", his heart softened. "Say what you want to say."

"It is normal for couples to fight. Look at me and Consort Han! We quarrel all the time too. In the beginning, there are a lot of disagreements. But as you quarrel, you get used to each other. Consort Han's temper is also becoming docile."

Prince Han spoke humorously and the Crown Prince smiled.

"Consort Han is becoming docile? I think you are the one becoming docile."

"Crown Prince, you don't understand women. To outsiders, you must give her face. However, once you are home, she will be as obedient as a cat. Consort Han is even trying to learn to cook and even made several dishes for me."

“Like that bowl of extremely salty chicken soup?” *Anyone with eyes could see that she was really trying hard.*

“Mmhm...actually chicken soup is nicer when it is salty. I got used to it the more I drank it.”

The Crown Prince and Prince Han both smiled.

“Crown Prince, you really shouldn’t quarrel with the Crown Princess anymore. No matter how wrong she is, she will still be the mother of your children. If you neglect her, the entire Eastern Palace will be affected. You have to support, give in and forgive each other. You should forgive her.”

“The Crown Princess created quite a bit of trouble for Consort Han. I never thought that you would speak up for her.” There were a lot of things that the Crown Prince knew.

“We are a family. The Crown Princess is my sister-in-law. We can’t hate our own sister-in-law right?”

The Crown Prince sighed softly, “If only she was as magnanimous as you all.”

As they spoke about their daily life, the Crown Prince shifted from not speaking his mind to telling the truth. The crack in their relationship seemed to mend itself.

1. Person in charge of announcing Imperial decrees and orders

Court Lady

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On her first day working as a Siyan, Prince Zhou called Fu Rou to Lingxiao Palace. She finally understood that no matter what position she held, she would always just be a 'palace lady' in Prince Zhou's eyes and had to run errands for him.

As Fu Rou stepped through the door, a shirt came flying towards her. She quickly caught it only to see the sleeves of the shirt torn and a hole in the chest area. The shirt was torn beyond belief. Looking up, she saw how tragic Prince Zhou's face looked and wanted to laugh but did not dare to.

Prince Zhou blamed her. "This is all your fault. Hurry up and mend it. If not, you have to compensate me with another one. No, it should be two more shirts personally made by you."

"What does Your Highness fighting with others have to do with me?" Although she said this, Fu Rou already knew the answer and took the shirt, getting ready to leave. "I still have things to do for Her Majesty."

"Just mend it here." Prince Zhou threw a sewing kit at her. "This is your first day at your new position. According to the rules, you don't have to be at Lizheng Palace. You are very free." He had already asked around.

Fu Rou did not say anything more as she sat on the swing and

mended his shirt. Prince Zhou read while sneaking looks at her.

“Tutor Qian is about to return to Chang’an.” His voice was light.

“Really?” She was extremely surprised.

“He came from the Qi State to Chang’an to have an audience with Imperial Father. I will ask Imperial Father to allow him to return to my side once again.”

He was surprised by her delighted reaction. “Why are you happier than me? I don’t think you know Tutor Qian.”

“But I read with you and heard you say many things about Tutor Qian. If Your Highness has someone that cares for you by your side, you will be a lot happier.” She was happy for him.

“You are concerned whether I am happy or not?” Her sentence made him excited.

“Yes, however-” She had a condition. “You can’t build your happiness from my suffering. You are best at catching other people’s weak points and using it as a threat.”

“A threat is a threat.” He neither admitted nor denied. “But I have never harmed you.”

“Who said so? When you fed me medicine...” *It greatly harmed her mental state!*

“What about it?” His tone was not at all vague.

“Never mind.” She became alert and immediately shut her mouth. She handed over the mended shirt to Prince Zhou. “I have done what you asked me to do. I shall take my leave now.”

Fu Rou turned to leave. Prince Zhou grabbed her wrist and turned her around. He stared at her. “When I fed you medicine that time, I...was very happy.”

“Your Highness, you were happy but I wasn’t.”

She took back her hand. Feelings could not be forced and she could not let him have any hope.

Fu Yin took the feather duster as she swiped here and there. Occasionally, she would glance out of the window.

The garden outside was huge and there were many flowers and plants she had never seen before. Even the fake mountain stone that seemed casual, looked peculiar. In the past, she had always thought that their house in Guangzhou was considered wealthy. It was only when she came here that she realised she was like a frog in a well and had yet to see the world. However, she was not jealous. She was grateful.

If her mother were still around, she would never have imagined that Fu Yin would have so much courage as to sell herself to the Lu family as a servant. Du Ning must have gone to her house. She wondered if he realised that she had left home for good and whether he thought that she was heartless.

The housekeeper had arranged for her to work in Lu Qi's study room. She would be able to see the son of her enemy very soon. Fu Yin's imagination ran wild and she became nervous.

A man wearing male robe entered. He was handsome and had a strong frame, looking grand and imposing.

The servant that was working in the study with her, Ling Long, had previously left Fu Yin in the study room and ordered her to finish the tasks. She suddenly appeared from nowhere and her makeup looked as if it had been touched up. She even changed into an eye-catching set of clothes. She moved in an alluring manner as she got closer to the man.

"Young Master, you have returned." Ling Long's voice became much gentler.

Fu Yin silently assessed Lu Qi. He did not look like a bad guy. One really could not judge a person from their appearance.

Lu Qi ordered, "Bring me a cup of tea."

“Yes.” Ling Long replied quickly as she turned and rolled her eyes at Fu Yin who was standing awkwardly. “Didn’t you hear? Young Master wants a cup of tea.”

Fu Yin placed down whatever she was doing and poured a cup of tea before walking towards Lu Qi. Ling Long stopped her and nimbly took the tray. She bent over and delivered the tea to Lu Qi.

Lu Qi took a sip and scalded his mouth. “Are you trying to scald me?”

Ling Long raised her brows and glared at Fu Yin. “What is going on? Didn’t I remind you that you must test the temperature of the tea before delivering it? You can’t even do something as simple as this? So stupid.”

Fu ying froze before replying slowly, “You never mentioned that before.”

Lu Qi glanced at Fu Yin as his feelings stirred. The maid’s features were delicate and her skin was soft and tender like bamboo shoots after a rain.

“Forget it.” He was moved and his tone warmed up. “Is she a new servant?”

“Yes, her name is Yin’er. Don’t look at her seemingly smart appearance, she is quite clumsy when it comes to working.” Ling Long quickly put her down.

Lu Qi assessed Fu Yin as his eyebrows raised. It was obvious that he was interested in her. “She is new and will need some time to adjust.”

Fu Yin avoided Lu Qi’s gaze. It made him excited, she was like an adorable rabbit. There would be a lot of time in the future. As he thought of this, he spread a piece of paper over the table and took off the lid on the ink slab. He had to complete the task his father gave him.

Ling Long came up enthusiastically. “Let me help you prepare the ink.”

Lu Qi frowned. “Ling Long, your perfume powder...” It had assaulted

his nose earlier. It was too strong.

“Ah, Young Master, you have such a sharp nose. I purposely asked someone to buy it for me from Hexiang Store.” Ling Long smiled flirtatiously and leaned against Lu Qi. “Doesn’t it smell nice?”

Lu Qi used the end of his brush to push Ling Long away. “It smells nice. But it is so strong that I feel like choking. You are like a fireworks tube, leave.”

Ling Long did not want to leave but Lu Qi threw her a sharp look and she did not dare to stay. She walked past Fu Yin, who was in a daze, and suddenly thought of something. She pulled Fu Yin along with her.

“Eh, don’t be delusional!” Ling Long dragged Fu Yin all the way to the back garden before flinging her hand away.

Fu Yin was not looking at Lu Qi but was focused on the small decorative dagger on the cupboard. She thought that if she could get near to Lu Qi, she would have a chance to stab him.

“Go and wash all these clothes.” Ling Long placed a huge bucket of clothes into Fu Yin’s hands.

Fu Yin could not help but say, “These are female clothes. However, the housekeeper said that I only need to wash the clothes Young Master takes off in the study room.”

“Just now when we were in front of Young Master, you pretended to be cold but now you dare to argue back!”

Ling Long came over to pinch her but Fu Yin dodged. Ling Long became furious and raised her hand to slap her. However, someone caught her hand.

“If the new maid does not know the rules, Ling Long, you can just say it nicely. Why do you need to slap her? If it leaves a mark, Brother Lu will lose face when there are guests to the study room. He will then look for you.” It was Lu Hanxing.

Fu Yin glanced at him. He gave off an unsettling aura.

"You are lucky. Get lost." Ling Long was extremely irritated. *This stupid maid has only been here for a day and she managed to seduce Lu Qi and Lu Hanxing. What is this!*

Fu Yin did not like the look Lu Hanxing was giving her and could not wait to leave. Lu Hanxing's gaze remained on Fu Yin. "The housekeeper's eyes are not bad this time, he chose a beautiful maid." However, as he saw Ling Long raised her eyebrows. He immediately lifted her chin and placed his lips extremely close to her mouth. "However, she is not as pretty as you."

Ling Long allowed Lu Hanxing to kiss her for a while before pushing him away. "Then why are you helping her?"

"I am clearly helping you." Lu Hanxing squeezed Ling Long's cheeks. "You look so angry. Has Lu Qi been ignoring you?"

Ling Long was unhappy. "Other than serving tea, I have been serving more tea. He even said that I put on too much perfume. I served him for so many years and only managed to seduce him once. He has no conscience. He took my innocence and merely let me be a servant in his room and doubled by pay. He then treats me like nothing."

Lu Hanxing was not surprised. "He wants a concubine, why didn't you go for it?"

"I don't go for it? I try so much, my head is about to explode yet he pretends not to notice. He even asked people to send in pictures, choosing here and there. In the end, he chose the lady from the Fu family. She has been married before, is infamous and is really unlucky. Because of her, he then had the Imperial Competition with Sheng Chumu and ended up getting beaten. He had to give up his bride on top of losing his army."

Lu Hanxing suddenly gave a stone face. "You keep on talking about Lu Qi, are you treating me as if I am dead?"

"You are the one that brought it up first. Moreover, if I am doing well, it is good for you too." Ling Long snuggled into Lu Hanxing's embrace. "Did you find me for something?"

Lu Hanxing appeared aroused. "Come into my room to help me mend my clothes. If you do it well, I have something for you."

Ling Long pretended to hit Lu Hanxing but still tried all ways to flatter and pamper him. The two of them secretly sang the same tune and both gained from fooling around with each other. Together, they plotted against Lu Qi. However, Lu Qi was unaware of all this.

Court Lady

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On this day, Ma Haihu decided that he was going to bring his gang of brothers to attack the Duke Lu Residence. He was going to give Sheng Chumu two choices. He could either marry Hainiu and everyone shall drink the celebratory wine happily or if he chose not to, they were going to kill him.

Everyone's firewood was ablaze when their servant suddenly ran in. He announced that the Sheng brothers from the Duke Lu Residence were here and they wanted to meet Ma Hainiu.

Ma Hainiu was excited and nervous at the same time. "What are they looking for me for? Has Sheng Chumu told his family about us?" All of a sudden, she realised that her elder brother and fellow brothers had all found seats. "They are here to see me, all of you look so coarse and fierce. When they come in, it will look as if they had entered a bandit's nest. Hurry and leave."

Haicao, who had grown up with Ma Hainiu, said roughly, "We are scared that you will get bullied."

Ma Haihu understood his sister the best. "Okay, okay, okay, we will leave. Younger Sister, we will be in the back. Anytime you need support, you can just call and we will be out to help."

Ma Hainiu pouted, "That's better."

Everyone hid in the inner house with their ears flattened against the wall.

Sheng Chuling entered with Sheng Chujun. They saw only Ma Hainiu and immediately stuck out their chests.

With their elder brother absent, the second brother should take charge. Sheng Chuling cleared his throat. "We came here today because..."

Ma Hainiu cut him off, "I know why you came."

Sheng Chujun was delighted. "That's great. Let's move quickly, hand the thing over."

Ma Hainiu was thinking that they were really direct. "How can it be so fast, I still have to prepare. Rest assured, when the time is right, I will get people to carry it to the Duke Lu Residence. It will at least be a few buckets full."

Sheng Chujun choked. "A few buckets? That is a lot for an antidote."

Ma Hainiu froze. "Antidote?"

Sheng Chuling started to realise that something was not right. "Then what did you think it was?"

Ma Hainiu raised her brows. "Wasn't it dowry?"

"Bah!" Sheng Chujun did not detect the danger. "Are you really thinking of marrying Elder Brother?"

"Of course I am going to marry Sheng Chumu, we have already..."

Sheng Chujun lifted his hand, with an expression that showed that he knew it all. "Kissed, hugged and even tore clothes."

Ma Hainiu said matter of fact, "That's right, so he has to marry me."

Sheng Chuling laughed, "So what? Don't you know the famous nickname my Elder Brother had last year in Chang'an? He is Chang'an's number one hedonist! If he had to marry every girl he

kissed--”

Sheng Chujun continued, “Then our Duke Lu Residence will be swarmed.”

Ma Hainiu was furious. “Oi! I treat both of you so nicely, yet you are so arrogant. What are you all even here for?”

“For the antidote!” Both brothers shouted together.

“The antidote? Impossible!”

“You want to be our sister-in-law? Impossible!”

Ma Hainiu suddenly shouted, “Elder Brother!”

Sheng Chujun chuckled, “It doesn’t matter how nicely you call us.”

Sheng Chuling looked back and tugged on Sheng Chujun’s sleeves. Sheng Chujun turned around. Oh god. They didn’t know when but the hall was suddenly filled with burly guys with broad shoulders and thick waists. The two of them did not even have time to get into position before they were attacked. Bam, bam. They were beaten up. Ma Hainiu calmed down and drank tea. She kept her ears alert. Finally, she heard the Sheng brothers shout Sister-in-law before she called for them to stop.

She asked, “You all are no longer against us?”

Sheng Chuling was the first to change his tune. “We are definitely not against it! As the second brother of Sheng Chumu, I will announce that I highly approve of this. This marriage is simply adding more close relatives. Let’s form a strong collaboration. The two of you are the ideal combination, no flaws at all!”

Ma Hainiu and the pirates’ gaze turned to Sheng Chujun.

“...” Sheng Chujun was frightened. He glared at his second brother. *His second brother already said everything he could think of!* He thought for a long while before managing to force out a sentence. “Have children early!”

Ma Hainiu was satisfied. "Since everyone always says words have no meaning, you two shall write that down. Put your fingerprints on it before you can leave."

Sheng Chuling and Sheng Chujun exchanged glances. *It was a mistake making this trip!*

The Crown Prince was invited to Grand Prince Liang's residence. He had finished an entire pot of tea but Grand Prince Liang had yet to appear. Suddenly, he saw a person wearing Turkish clothes walk past the hall. He was startled. *His Imperial Father had just begun a war against Illig Qaghan. Why was there a Turkish person in Grand Prince Liang's residence?* He immediately sprung to action as he silently followed the person. He realised that the Turkish person had smoothly made his way into the back garden. Grand Prince Liang, who had yet to appear in the front hall, was actually waiting there.

Grand Prince Liang asked, "Is everything ready?"

The Turkish man replied, "Everything is ready. I have checked every blade, they are all sharp."

Grand Prince Liang lowered his voice. "It is rare that the Crown Prince is willing to visit me. We cannot make any mistakes."

"Please rest assure, Your Highness."

"Good." Grand Prince Liang spoke mysteriously, "I will go and meet the Crown Prince now."

Hiding in the dark, the Crown Prince heard everything clearly. He never thought that Grand Prince Liang would harbour evil intentions and collude with the Turkish people to set a trap to bring him down. He turned to leave. However, Grand Prince Liang's residence was huge and very soon, he met with several guards. They seemed to be looking for someone. He knew that they were looking for him and had no choice but to retreat to the back garden, hoping that there would be another exit.

Initially, he was still clear as to which direction he should go.

However, as the footsteps of the guards neared, the Crown Prince had to give up using the corridor and hide within a small forest. He was panicking and could not recognise the way. All of a sudden, a green field appeared before him. He was extremely astonished. There were several tents set up and Turkish people were walking about as if he was the uninvited guest.

The Crown Prince suddenly turned around. Grand Prince Liang was standing behind him with his guards.

“Grand Prince Liang...” *What are you trying to do!*

Grand Prince Liang laughed lightly, “Aiya, you found out. I wanted to give you a surprise.”

“I am not feeling well, I think I should go back...” The Crown Prince thought that Grand Prince Liang would not realise that he had found out and that he still had a chance to escape.

“Eh! It is so rare that you are here, you can’t leave like this. I prepared all these for you and you haven’t got to taste any yet. Come come come!” Grand Prince Liang enthusiastically pulled the Crown Prince to the tents.

The Crown Prince was being dragged by Grand Prince Liang. In front of him, two fierce looking Turkish warriors brandished their bent swords. The Crown Prince could not help but clench his fists, ready to fight for his life. They lifted their swords towards the skies. However, the swords did not swing down and the soldiers started to cheer.

The Crown Prince was stunned. “Aren’t they Turkish people?”

Grand Prince Liang laughed and replied, “Of course not. These are my soldiers dressed up as them. How is it? Isn’t it rare to see such plains in Chang’an? Desert scenes are my favourite. It is a pity that I am Grand Prince Liang and cannot wish to ever go to a desert. I can only ask people to dress up and set up some tents to satisfy my craving.”

The Crown Prince smiled as well. “Grand Prince Liang, you are in a good mood.”

Grand Prince Liang ordered his men to start the bonfire and bring out the huge pot. The huge pot was filled with meat and a thick bone soup. Ladies dressed in Turkish attire started to dance as the guards scooped out large pieces of meat from the boiling soup. They placed it in a huge bowl and served it to Grand Prince Liang and the Crown Prince. Grand Prince Liang took out a Turkish-looking small knife and heroically cut up the meat. He pierced a piece of meat and placed it into his mouth. A guard presented a small knife to the Crown Prince.

These were all new to the Crown Prince.

Grand Prince Liang boasted as he ate, "This knife is a genuine item bought back from the desert. It is extremely exciting to use it to cut meat. I especially asked them to sharpen the knife. Crown Prince, use it and see for yourself."

The Crown Prince was interested as he cut up a piece and placed it in his mouth. "Not bad, it tastes especially nice. But is this...beef?"

Grand Prince Liang nodded. "Yes."

The Crown Prince hesitated, "Imperial Father ordered the cows to be cherished and not to kill them for no reason. The number of cows are all recorded. Grand Prince Liang, how did you report to the officials after killing a cow?"

Grand Prince Liang grinned. "It doesn't matter, there is no need to report. This cow was stolen."

"What?" The Crown Prince was shocked. "You stole a cow? Whose did you steal? Stealing cows from farmers is equivalent to hurting farmers and the punishment is severe."

"Aiya, my dear Crown Prince. With our status, what is the big deal about stealing a cow? Even if we get found out, it is not like we kidnapped women. We can just compensate them for a cow. You should let go of those rules for the time being and happily enjoy your time. Can you do that? Grand Prince Liang cut a piece of meat and handed it over, along with the knife, to the Crown Prince. "Eat!"

The Crown Prince suddenly reached out to take the knife and ate the meat heartily. *Take it as if it is a dream. When he wakes up, he can go back to being the Li Chengqian who was bound by his hands and legs by the uncountable number of rules.*

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The Crown Prince opened his eyes and realised Sun Lingshu was lying on his chest. He vaguely remembered getting drunk the previous night. Grand Prince Liang asked his men to send him back to the Eastern Palace. The internal attendant then asked where he wanted to rest and he replied with the Crown Princess' quarters. Prince Han's words had touched his heart. As the saying goes, not for the sake of the monk but for the Buddha. He was going to be a father.

The Crown Prince stretched out his hand and shifted Sun Lingshu's head, allowing her to sleep more comfortably. He saw how well she slept and could not help but brush her cheek. On the day of their marriage, Sun Lingshu's face was as bright as a red apple, it was moist and healthy. Now, not much time had passed but she had lost a lot of weight.

The Crown Prince's gaze fell onto the bump on her belly. It was actually very tough on a mother to give birth to a child. His hand subconsciously shifted over. A foreign warmth blossomed in his heart. Maybe, he could become a good father.

Sun Lingshu woke up and saw the Crown Prince. She quickly sat up. It was obvious that she was uncomfortable.

"Did I squash you? It is all my fault. I fell into too deep of a sleep. Is your shoulder numb?"

“It is okay.” The Crown Prince got off the bed and picked up his clothes.

“I...” Sun Lingshu paused, “Let me help you.”

The Crown Prince stopped her. “There is no need.”

“But Your Highness...”

The Crown Prince called for a palace maid to help him wash up and change. Every time he saw Sun Lingshu make a move to stand, he would ask her to sit.

Sun Lingshu thought that the Crown Prince was still angry with her but only came because he was drunk and made a mistake. Hence, she did not dare to go against him.

After the Crown Prince finished washing up, he was about to talk to Sun Lingshu when an internal attendant came in to say that Zhan Xuanzhi was seeking an audience.

As Sun Lingshu watched the Crown Prince leave, she felt as if her heart was being torn apart. When he came over last night, she was extremely delighted. Despite him calling for Chen Ji in his sleep, she was still satisfied. However, when day came, she woke up from her dream.

It seemed like the Crown Prince had also woken up from his dream.

Zhan Xuanzhi conveyed the decree that he was going to be the right hand man of the Crown Prince and specially came to greet him.

The Crown Prince was not particularly fond of Zhan Xuanzhi and felt like he always speaks in a way that fishes for compliments. However, he had to obey his Imperial Father’s orders.

“With you by my side, in the future I will be able to listen to...a lot of your unique speeches.”

Zhan Xuanzhi could sense what he was trying to imply. However, his expression did not change. “Your Highness, loyal advice will forever be annoying to hear. However, loyal advice can rectify Your

Highness' mistakes and protect your future."

"I know. Didn't Imperial Father send you here precisely because you like to admonish? I am also someone that takes admonishment well. In the future, if you have anything to say, you can tell me. If you are right, I will reward you." The Crown Prince decided to accept him.

"Your Highness, can you really take my admonishment?"

"Yes I can."

"Then can I say something now?"

"Sure. What would you like to admonish?"

"I would like to admonish your proud and arrogant behaviour. If you do not change, there will be a disaster!"

"Zhan Xuanzhi, how presumptuous of you!" *Just because he gave him three colours, does that mean he could start a dye workshop?*

"Your Highness is the one that is presumptuous. Grand Prince Liang has been doted on by the Grand Emperor. He is the one that has been indulged and allowed to do whatever he wants the most. Your Highness studies politics in your free time and should know that you should interact with someone like Prince Han who is well-read and moral. Why did you go and look for Grand Prince Liang? Grand Prince Liang's residence is a place where corruption is concealed. As the Crown Prince, you did not bring any guards and went by yourself. You even got drunk. Is this how the heir to Great Tang should behave? How can you face His Majesty? He has put in so much effort and has high expectations of you. What right do you have to be everyone's role model?"

Zhan Xuanzhi did not hold back at all. He warned the Crown Prince strictly and the Crown Prince woke up from his good dream.

Sun Lingshu sat on a couch by the window and completely focused on sewing a set of small clothes. The Crown Prince had rested in her quarters the previous night. Although he did not want her to help

him change and his tone was still cold, he showed a hint of consideration, causing her heart warm up.

All of a sudden, a loud explosion from something hitting the ground. Sun Lingshu was shocked and went out to see what was happening. The door of the side palace was wide open as the study table had been flipped. The Crown Prince was sitting on a stool with a furious and pained expression. However, his eyes looked empty.

“Your Highness, did I do something wrong that made you angry?” Sun Lingshu stood by the door and asked timidly.

The Crown Prince’s gaze fell to the bump on Sun Lingshu’s tummy and forced himself to say, “It has nothing to do with you. I just feel irritated and could not help but burst out in anger.”

“Did Lord Zhan say something?” In the morning, the Crown Prince had rushed to meet Zhan Xuanzhi. Sun Lingshu naturally assumed it would have something to do with him.

“You know him?” The Crown Prince had indeed been frustrated after being lectured by Zhan Xuanzhi. He blew up, abandoned Zhan Xuanzhi and came back.

“My father occasionally talks about him. He said that Zhan Xuanzhi is more direct and says things that people do not like to hear...”

The Crown Prince suddenly lifted his hand. “You should not speak about matters of the court.”

Sun Lingshu immediately took a step back in shock. “Yes.”

The Crown Prince stood up and took big strides outwards. As he walked past Sun Lingshu, cold air blew past.

Sun Lingshu looked down and bit her lip, her heart dropping to rock bottom.

She wondered when she would ever receive her husband’s love. It seemed like whatever she said was wrong. Yet, she did not understand what she had done wrong. The only thing she regretted was Chen Ji’s death. *If only Chen Ji was still alive. At least Chen Ji could*

make the Crown Prince happy and she could see his smile.

The Crown Prince was not depressed like Sun Lingshu. He decided to go and look for Zhan Xuanzhi to try and appease him. In his mind, he thought about his parents' faces and their expectations for him. He was the Crown Prince. Before he could become the Emperor, he had to bear with all these rigid rules and the people that enforced these rules on him. Only this way, would Chen Ji not have died a meaningless death.

Zhan Xuanzhi was initially fuming and was ready to look for the Emperor to request for a change in post. He did not expect the Crown Prince to return and greet him with a huge bow. The Crown Prince admitted that Grand Prince Liang did not do certain things well and he will try to interact with him less. Seeing how the Crown Prince accepted his advice, the knot in Zhan Xuanzhi's heart unravelled.

At this moment, Prince Han had sent people to invite the Crown Prince over as he had obtained a good piece of calligraphy.

Zhan Xuanzhi believed that Prince Han had set up his own literature school and was in the midst of writing his geography book. He even received the appraisal of the Emperor. There were a lot of talents in Prince Han's residence. Moreover, Prince Han was the Crown Prince's real [1] brother and if they got along, it would make their Imperial Mother happy. It would also give the Crown Prince a good reputation.

Zhan Xuanzhi was pleased that the Crown Prince immediately agreed to go.

However, as the Crown Prince left the palace, he saw Grand Prince Liang. He was feeling frantic and looked left and right. All of a sudden, he saw Sheng Chumu standing on the other side of the palace gate and thought of a plan.

“General Sheng.” The Crown Prince waved.

Sheng Chumu noticed the Crown Prince and bowed. “Your Highness.”

Sheng Chumu had just forced Chuling into the palace, requesting him

to explain the situation with Ma Hainiu to Fu Rou. He was taking precautions to prevent his useless second brother from escaping. Not only had his two brothers failed to handle Ma Hainiu, they even created more trouble for him by approving Ma Hainiu as his wife on paper with their signatures. If Fu Rou were to know about this, she would think that he truly did something so wrong that his own brothers were on Ma Hainiu's side.

"Prince Han invited me over to appreciate some calligraphy, do you want to come along?" Actually, the Crown Prince was using Sheng Chumu as a shield.

Sheng Chumu seemed to hesitate. "Okay, I was just going to look for my sister."

The Crown Prince suddenly lowered his voice, "Later when Grand Prince Liang comes over, help me block him."

Sheng Chumu was stunned but Grand Prince Liang was already in front of them. Grand Prince Liang got off his horse and spoke in an extremely welcoming tone, "Crown Prince, you drank quite a bit last night. Did you have a headache when you got up today?"

The Crown Prince smiled painstakingly, "I am okay. Thank you for your concern, Grand Prince Liang."

Grand Prince Liang noticed that the Crown Prince's expression was slightly awkward. "We are a family, there is no need to stand on courtesy. Where are you going now?"

The Crown Prince replied, "Prince Han's residence."

"Let me go with you. After we visit Prince Han's residence, we can head over to my place." Grand Prince Liang gave a suggestive look. "I still have a lot of interesting things to show you. I assure you that you will enjoy it."

"Your Highness, Prince Han invited a group of talented scholars today to discuss geographical matters. I am afraid that it will take up an entire day." Sheng Chumu suddenly understood why the Crown Prince had asked him to help.

The Crown Prince added, “We might even have to have dinner in the Han Mansion. It is going to be boring but if Grand Prince Liang goes, things might be more exciting.”

Grand Prince Liang hesitated as he was reluctant to discuss geography for the entire day.

“Your Highness must have forgotten. Grand Prince Liang does not like dull and heavy events.” Sheng Chumu could tell the Crown Prince's intention. The Crown Prince pretended to come to a realization. “Oh yes, then I should not force you.”

“Your Highness, Prince Han is still waiting for you, we should not delay any longer.”

The Crown Prince immediately nodded. “Right, it is not good to be late.” He smiled apologetically at Grand Prince Liang. “Grand Prince Liang, let's talk next time.”

“Mmhm, I have no interest in geography. However-” When Grand Prince Liang was brought back to reality, he was shocked to realise that Sheng Chumu and the Crown Prince were already a distance away. “Eh? Crown Prince? Crown Prince...” *Weird, why did it feel like the Crown Prince was deliberately avoiding him? They had enjoyed themselves yesterday.*

1. same biological parents

Court Lady

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The more Grand Prince Liang thought about it, the angrier he got. He immediately headed to the brothels. Initially, he had plans with other people but dropped them so that he could find the Crown Prince. He did not expect the Crown Prince to avoid him. He had gotten closer to the Crown Prince only to secure his own future. The Grand Emperor was getting old and he had no brotherly relationship with his brother, the Emperor. If not, he would not have lowered himself just to get on his nephew's good side.

In the brothel, Grand Prince Liang had a lot of scoundrels as friends. They had arranged to meet in the day because Du He, the Emperor's son-in-law, was in their group and he had to attend to his wife in the night. When Grand Prince Liang sat, he saw that Lu Qi was around and found it strange.

"The Lu family's upbringing is so strict, how come you are with these guys?"

Lu Qi smiled, "Du He asked me to come. I did not think it would be this unconventional place. But since I am already here, I might as well enjoy it."

Grand Prince Liang clapped and laughed. "What a great statement. That is something a man would say."

Zhang He, who always hung out with Grand Prince Liang, found it

strange. “Aiya, I thought Your Highness was going to find the Crown Prince to hang out and didn’t have time for me?”

Grand Prince Liang fumed, “I don’t know why but the Crown Prince suddenly decided not to acknowledge me. It seemed as if he was scared that I would bother him and looked down on me. Yesterday, we were still enjoying ourselves and I saw that he was quite happy when he returned to the Eastern Palace last night. However, when we met this morning, he said that he was going to Prince Han’s residence to discuss geography and left without saying more.”

“The Crown Prince can’t change overnight. Did someone try to ruin the relationship between Your Highness and the Crown Prince? The Crown Prince is the heir and will be the future ruler. If he misunderstands or even despises you just because someone tried to instigate him... It doesn’t matter now, but I worry about the future. Since the Crown Prince was rushing to Prince Han’s residence, I wonder if this has something to do with Prince Han...”

Like father, like son. Lu Qi was identical to his father in which they loved to push the blame onto Prince Han.

“Hmph! Prince Han looks loyal but he is actually full of crafty thoughts. Today, Sheng Xiaojing’s son was also with the Crown Prince. He also was expressionless. It makes me angry just looking at him.” Grand Prince Liang immediately believed Lu Qi.

Lu Qi’s gaze froze. “Sheng Xiaojing’s son? Sheng Chumu?”

Grand Prince Liang nodded, “Yes, that’s him.”

Lu Qi chuckled coldly, “Then that’s it. Sheng Chumu is sly and harbours unfathomable motives. Previously, my father and I were almost ruined because of him. I never thought that he would turn his attention to you, Grand Prince Liang.”

Grand Prince Liang thought about it and shook his head. “I have no animosity with the Duke Lu Residence, why would he do that?”

Lu Qi fanned the fire. “Consort Han is Sheng Chumu’s sister. Prince Han just needs to speak and Sheng Chumu would say bad things

about Your Highness to the Crown Prince.”

Grand Prince Liang gritted his teeth. “Ridiculous! Sheng Chumu, watch how I will deal with you!”

Lu Qi’s eyes lit up. “Also, let me tell you something. Sheng Chumu likes a female official in the palace. That person was previously in the Seamstress Department. However, the Empress thinks highly of her and promoted her to a Siyan. She is beautiful...”

Grand Prince Liang’s eyes lit up.

Lu Qi entered the study room. Fu Yin tied up the curtains. He suddenly stopped and pinched her chin, lifting her head up. He realised that there was a bruise on her face.

“What happened to your face?” Lu Qi asked.

“No...Nothing.” Fu Yin did not want to quarrel.

It had been less than two days, but Fu Yin was already tired of the trouble that Ling Long was giving her. Washing clothes, wiping the floor, Ling Long even started to control and reduce her meals. But Fu Yin knew that she had to bear with it. Only by staying beside Lu Qi could she find a chance to take her revenge.

Lu Qi found it bothersome. “Go and ask the housekeeper for some medicine. No one is allowed to have such an ugly face when serving in my study room.”

At this moment, Ling Long walked in. She threw Fu Yin a look before heading over to help Lu Qi prepare ink.

“Are you working hard again today?” As Ling Long spoke, her eyes kept drifting to the paper. Lu Hanxing mentioned that Lu Yunji had given him and Lu Qi homework and he wanted Ling Long to find out how Lu Qi was doing.

Unfortunately, Ling Long focused too much, causing the black ink to fly all over the place and ruining the piece that Lu Qi was writing. In

a frenzy, she tried to save it but ended up knocking over the teacup next to it. The whole study table was in a mess.

“The more you help, the more trouble you create!” Lu Qi threw his brush down and stomped off.

Ling Long acted as if she had been wronged. When she saw that Lu Qi did not look back, she immediately became fierce and shouted at Fu Yin.

“Aren’t you going to hurry and clean up! Useless thing. If you dare to do anything poorly, watch how I will tear your slutty self apart! Aren’t you very good? You have only been here a few days and you know how to complain to Young Master. You don’t allow me to pinch your beautiful face? Pah! What do you think you are? So what if I can’t pinch your face? I can pinch here, here, here!” Ling Long used all her might to pinch the back of Fu Yin’s neck and over her arms.

Fu Yin did not complain as she cleaned the floor. For her mother, she was not afraid of hardship.

As the sun rose the next day, Fu Yin was already done with a lot of her chores. However, she had no choice but to help Ling Long wash her clothes. She struggled to carry the wooden pail. While walking past Ling Long’s room, she suddenly heard a man’s voice. But it was not Lu Qi’s voice. Fu Yin sneakily peeped through a small crack by the window.

Ling Long was wearing a glamorous pearl dress as she turned around to assess herself in the copper mirror. She looked proud. Lu Hanxing was standing behind her. The two of them were so intimate it would make anyone who saw them jealous.

“Didn’t I tell you that we can’t keep this? We have to get rid of it.” Lu Hanxing reached out to stroke the pearl dress.

When the Lu father and son pair were in prison, Lu Hanxing had taken the chance to get this pearl dress from Lu Yingying, using the excuse of exchanging it for money. He then gifted it to Ling Long to please her.

"I took it out because we have to get rid of it. It is so beautiful. What a pity. I wanted to wear it for a while before getting rid of it." Ling Long pouted and took off the pearl dress, quickly cutting off the pearls. "Are you satisfied now? No one would be able to tell."

Lu Hanxing could sense her unwillingness. "It is just a pearl dress. Wait for me to finish another two more battles and I will bring one back for you."

"Forget it, how can a servant like me where this? Even if you really gave it to me, I can only keep it at the bottom of my closet. Sigh, we have different fates. Why wasn't I reincarnated in a good family?"

She hated it. When she wore the pearl dress, she was comparable to Lu Yingying in terms of looks.

"Stop complaining. Isn't it great that you met me?" Lu Hanxing hugged Ling Long from behind. "When Lu Qi wanted to take that beautiful Fu lady as a concubine, didn't you hate her to death? I even helped you get back at her."

"Show off. Of course I know you helped me." Ling Long turned around. Lu Hanxing blurted, "I was the one that set the Fu family's house on fire..."

Stunned, Fu Yin quickly walked to the arched door in the small yard. However, her vision was blurry from tears and she tripped over the door sill. The wooden pail she was holding fell to the floor with a loud sound.

Ling Long and Lu Hanxing dashed out and saw Fu Yin sitting on the floor. They exchanged glances as they walked over to her.

Ling Long became fierce. "Yin'er, you useless thing, what have you done now?"

With tears still in her eyes, Fu Yin answered timidly, "I finished washing the clothes and was about to hang them out to dry. But the clothes were too heavy and I lost my balance..."

"Eh, which noble lady are you? You just washed a few sets of clothes and you look so wronged? Wait! Isn't this the new dress that I just

wore yesterday?”

Fu Yin picked it up. “I will go and wash it now...”

“I’ll say, how can a pail of clothes fall to the ground so easily? Very good! You just can’t bear to see me have a beautiful dress. You black-hearted witch! You did it on purpose!” Ling Long grabbed onto Fu Yin and started to pinch her.

“Stop hitting her. It is just a skirt, I will buy you a new one. Look at her white neck, there are bruises from you hitting her. If Lu Qi sees, he won’t be happy.” As Lu Hanxing spoke, he reached out his hand. His face seemed to be smiling as he made a move to touch Fu Yin’s neck.

Ling Long slapped Lu Hanxing’s hand away and glared menacingly at Fu Yin. “What are you looking at! Go and do your job! You wave your tail every time you see someone. Who is going to fall for your tricks?!”

Fu Yin wiped away her tears and picked up the clothes to place them in the wooden pail. She turned to leave.

“Stop right there!” Ling Long suddenly shouted.

Fu Yin was extremely frightened that they might have found out that she was eavesdropping. However, Ling Long just wanted her to buy perfume powder. She could not help but breathe a sigh of relief. She left the yard and ran to a hidden corner where she sank to the ground. Hugging her knees, her entire body trembled and she cried bitterly.

She had found her mother’s murderer!

Court Lady

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“Picture of a beauty?” Prince Zhou raised his brows as he looked at Fu Rou. It was extremely rare that Fu Rou would take the initiative to come to Lingxiao Palace and he did not expect her to make such a request.

Fu Rou had gone to see her fellow sisters in the Seamstress Department today and found out that Grand Prince Liang had requested for them to do an embroidery of a beauty. However, they submitted a few pieces but he was not satisfied. Head Seamstress Yuan wanted to ask Prince Zhou for help as they knew he was skilled in drawing beauties but did not know how to ask. Hence, Fu Rou agreed to help.

“Just one picture will do. I will repay you.” Fu Rou did not say more.

“Do I look like a random street artist?” Prince Zhou’s tone changed as his interest seemed to be piqued. “What kind of reward?”

“What kind of reward would Your Highness like?”

“Fu Siyan, you can’t get angry after hearing it...”

“Then don’t say it.” Fu Rou immediately strangled the cradle, “I will sew you an embroidery piece as your repayment.”

Prince Zhou felt like it was not enough. “You should make me

another set of new clothes. Although the previous set has been mended, it has been torn before. I want a new set. It is very reasonable.”

“Okay.” *This was easy.*

“I have another condition.” Prince Zhou was pushing his luck. “The next time you are allowed to leave the palace, accompany me for a day.”

Fu Rou did not hesitate. “No.”

Prince Zhou did not feel good. “Are you afraid that Sheng Chumu will be angry? He has a complicated relationship with that female pirate. Can you really stand this kind of man?”

Fu Rou did not waver. “That is my business.”

“If you do not accompany me, then I will not do the painting of the beauty.”

Fu Rou turned to leave.

“Okay okay, isn’t it just a picture of a beauty? I will give it to you.” Prince Zhou saw that she could not take the joke and hurried to open his cabinet. He grabbed a bunch of drawings and sat them on the table. “These are all fresh, you can choose any you like. Since I am feeling good today, I will let you have it easy.”

Fu Rou flipped the drawings over and was surprised to find that they were all paintings of her. Prince Zhou stared intensely at the side of Fu Rou’s face. “That’s right, they are all of you.”

Fu Rou looked down and continued flipping through the pictures. They were all paintings of her reading, embroidering, looking at the moon, and sick in bed. She had never seen these sides of herself before. Eventually, she picked a half-body picture of her front view and was satisfied.

Prince Zhou laughed. “Mmhm, good taste. I believe I have managed to capture your grace in that piece.”

“Thank you for the picture, Your Highness.” Fu Rou bowed. “After I hand this drawing over to Seamstress Xue, I will work on the new set of clothes.”

“Seamstress Xue?” Prince Zhou held back his smile. “Isn’t it for yourself?”

“Grand Prince Liang says that the embroidery of a beauty presented by the Seamstress Department is not up to standard and wanted to ask you for a picture.” To prevent Prince Zhou from thinking that she was vain, Fu Rou explained the situation.

Prince Zhou snatched back the picture and stuffed all the drawings back into the cabinet. He even locked it.

“Do you have brains? Grand Prince Liang is a pervert and other people are trying to avoid him. On the other hand, you are presenting your picture to him. Are you afraid that Grand Prince Liang is unaware of your beauty? Or do you think that your life is too comfortable in the palace? Do you know what consequences are if Grand Prince Liang starts to harbour intentions after seeing your picture? The Grand Emperor dotes on him and he just needs to ask and he will be able to get any palace lady. Even ten Sheng Chumus will not be able to save you.”

It was only then did Fu Rou react. “You are right, Your Highness. I was just thinking of the errand for the Seamstress Department and did not think much.”

Prince Zhou laughed bitterly, “You are considered experienced in the palace but you still don’t know how to protect yourself.”

She had been in the palace for less than a year, how was it considered experienced? She wanted to argue with him but saw that Prince Zhou had laid out a piece of paper as he pointed at the ink slab and gave her a look.

Fu Rou mechanically stepped up to prepare the ink.

“I promised to give you a picture of a beauty, you can't use the ones I have drawn. I shall draw another one for you now so that you will be

able to get back to the Seamstress Department.”

Fu Rou was grateful. “Thank you for your kind understanding.”

Very soon, Prince Zhou drew a beauty. She had peach blossom eyes and cherry lips. Her skin was white as snow and she had a slender waistline.

“Your Highness, this lady is--” Fu Rou immediately recognised her.

A sinister look flashed through his eyes. “Lu Yunji’s daughter, Lu Yingying.”

Fu Rou fell silent for a second before saying, “Your Highness, can you draw another one?”

“Don’t you hate Lu Yunji?” He was helping her.

“Yes, I hate Lu Yunji. But that does not mean I want to harm his daughter. I have nothing against Lu Yingying. Knowing Grand Prince Liang’s character, I don’t think we should sew a picture of her and present it to him. Isn’t she innocent? Your Highness, you do not have to do this for me.”

“To tell you the truth, it is not only because of you. I hate Lu Yunji as well. Lu Yunji is currently holding onto the Crown Prince tightly and trying to get into his good books. He is always creating trouble for me.” He was not as magnanimous as her.

Fu Rou looked at Prince Zhou and sighed gently.

Prince Zhou tested, “Are you really not going to consider using Grand Prince Liang to get back at Lu Yunji?”

Fu Rou shook her head.

“I like your honest and fair personality. Okay, I will draw another piece.” Prince Zhou started to draw once again. Very soon, a beauty appeared. When the ink dried, he handed it over to Fu Rou.

“This time I did not draw it based on a person and thought of this beauty myself. No one will suffer because of this. Kind Fu Siyan, are

you happy now?"

"Thank you, Your Highness. I will take my leave now." Fu Rou took it and walked to the door. She suddenly turned around, "Although you did not manage to make Lu Yunji suffer, you won't feel horrible now and might even feel slightly relaxed. There is nothing to lose in being a good person."

Prince Zhou looked on as Fu Rou walked away before muttering to himself, "Now that you've mentioned it, I do feel quite relaxed."

Fu Rou held onto the drawing and walked past the Imperial Garden. She heard a cat meowing from behind the fake mountain rock. She thought it was a pet of one of the ladies. However, as she turned behind, a huge and tall black figure appeared and Sheng Chuling's mischievous face could be seen. Assessing his surroundings, Sheng Chuling frantically beckoned her to come over.

Fu Rou walked over. "You are an Imperial Guard and should be doing your job. What if someone catches you sneaking around?"

Sheng Chuling sighed, "I know that but I had to come. If I don't pass on the message, Elder Brother will kill me when I get back."

Fu Rou laughed, "Okay, tell me now."

Sheng Chuling coughed twice. "The following words are sincerely spoken by Sheng Chumu to Fu Rou." His voice became extremely shy, "Rou'er, I don't care what you are thinking but you have to believe me. I have nothing to do with Ma Hainiu..."

Sheng Chuling spoke a whole bunch.

"...this was what happened. Nothing that has been said is a lie. I, Sheng Chumu, swear that I only have you in my heart." Sheng Chuling coughed and acted as if he could not take it anymore. He changed back to his normal way of speech before breathing out. "My god, I finally recited everything. I have sacrificed my skin to goosebumps."

Fu Rou was calm. "Chumu forced you to come and find me just to say this?"

“Yes.” Sheng Chuling suddenly recalled, “Oh right, there is another thing that he wanted me to tell you.”

Fu Rou asked, “What?”

“Your sister, Fu Yin, has left the family.”

Fu Rou was bewildered. “What? She left the family?” She stomped her foot in anxiousness. “Why...why are you only telling me this now?” *Everything he said before was useless!*

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Fu Yin grabbed onto Ling Long's wrist, refusing to let go. Ling Long wanted her bracelet and had actually stolen it from her. She has been the one doing the chores, getting her meals reduced and even put up with Ling Long's abuse. She could bear all this. However, she was not going to give in for the bracelet.

Ling Long was extremely greedy. "You stupid brat. You are so poor that you had to sell yourself, how can you have something valuable with you? You must have stolen it. This is a stolen good!"

"I am not a thief!" Fu Yin pushed Ling Long onto the ground.

"Do you want to die?!" Ling Long climbed up and pulled Fu Yin's hair. "How dare you hit me! You stupid brat! Are you trying to rebel! I will kill you! I will kill you!"

Fu Yin fought back. "Let me go! Ah!"

"Stop it!" Lu Qi walked into the study room only to see the two of them fighting like street cats over food. He did not know whether to laugh or to scold them.

Ling Long looked back and quickly released Fu Yin and acted cute towards Lu Qi. "Young Master, Yin'er is a thief. I asked her where she got the bracelet and not only did she lie to me, she also pushed me onto the ground."

Fu Yin raised her voice. "I am not a thief, this was left to me by my mother."

Lu Qi's gaze brushed over Fu Yin's sorry figure and said coldly. "Housekeeper Wu was the one that bought you. If we just ask Housekeeper Wu, he will know whether you stole it or had it with you. Go and call Housekeeper Wu over."

Soon, Housekeeper Wu came. He verified that when Fu Yin entered the residence, she already had this bracelet on her and it was an item left behind by her mother. She would rather sell herself than sell the bracelet.

Ling Long was guilty. "But..."

Lu Qi was impatient. "Have I been unkind to you? Have I never rewarded you with a bracelet? You are quarreling over a broken bracelet and even accuse someone of being a thief. If there were outsiders, my reputation would have been ruined."

Ling Long wanted to try and charm him but Lu Qi behaved as if he was trying to chase out a housefly and asked her to leave. Fu Yin moved to exit as well.

"Pour me tea." Lu Qi knocked the table. He saw that Fu Yin did not respond to him and was about to step out of the room. "Yin'er!"

It was only then that Fu Yin stopped and turned around with a blank face. "Ah?"

Lu Qi snorted, "Didn't you hear me? Pour tea."

"Oh." Fu Yin turned back to the table and took her time to pour the tea. Lu Qi took a sip before looking up at Fu Yin. He saw that she was standing uncomfortably. "Why do you look so dazed?"

"I don't normally serve you, it is a little..." Fu Yin forced out, "...foreign."

"Do you know how to prepare ink?" Lu Qi tilted his chin towards the ink slab. "Oh, yes." Fu Yin hesitated for a second before replying.

At this moment, Lu Yingying entered. "Elder Brother, you are looking for me?"

Fu Yin had never seen Lu Yingying before and thought that she was beautiful. She couldn't take her eyes off Lu Yingying.

"Last time, I promised to help you paint a picture of beauties but did not have time. How about we do it today?" He realised that Fu Yin was staring blankly again and Lu Qi reached out to lightly hit her head. "You really don't know how to serve. How can you not know how to serve a cup of tea?"

"Oh, yes." Fu Yin hurried to retrieve a cup.

Lu Yingying assessed Fu Yin. "Is this your new maid for your study room? She has defined features and is very cute. Much better looking than Ling Long."

Lu Qi scoffed. "She is good looking but a little slow."

"There are benefits to being slow. I like those that are slightly slow, since they won't talk too much. Elder Brother, if you don't like her, you can give her to me." Lu Yingying genuinely wanted Fu Yin.

"Who said that I don't like her?" Lu Qi switched the topic. "Yingying, where is that pearl dress of yours? Go and wear it. The picture will be nicer if I drew that."

Nanny Fan replied, "It is gone. When the incident happened previously, we gave everything that was valuable to Lu Hanxing to plead for help. Young Lady's pearl dress has also been given away."

Lu Yingying smiled, "These are all external items. It is sufficient that Father and Brother returned home safely."

Fu Yin finally poured the tea and offered it. "Please have some tea."

"Mhm, you look beautiful, have a nice personality and a nice voice. Your name is Yin'er, right?" Lu Yingying's gaze fell onto the bruise on Fu Yin's wrist. "Eh, why do you have a bruise?"

Fu Yin withdrew her hand and carefully covered it. "I was careless

and accidentally knocked into a pillar.”

Lu Yingying, however, understood immediately. “You are really a silly girl, you don’t even know how to lie. How can a bruise from a pillar look the same as one with scratches? There is no need to ask. Ling Long must have done this. The previous few times Housekeeper Wu bought new servants, none of them stayed.”

Lu Qi could not help but find it strange. “Yingying, when did Ling Long offend you?”

Lu Yingying pouted. “She did not offend me, but whenever I see her, I feel uncomfortable. Okay, she is your servant, I am too lazy to bother. You can draw me next time, I am going out.”

Lu Qi quickly stood up. “Out? Eh, let me accompany you in case you get lost again.”

Lu Yingying rejected him. “I don’t want you to follow me. You are so fierce. When you stand behind me, the entire street of people run away because they are afraid of you. How can I shop in peace?”

Lu Qi hesitated. He was not comfortable with her going alone.

“Elder Brother, don’t forget what Father said. I am frustrated about the cancellation of marriage with Duke Cheng’s son and I have to frequently go out to stroll to relax. Father said that I can go alone. If you do not agree, we can go and talk to Father.” Lu Yingying was confident with her father backing her.

“See Father over a small matter like this?” Lu Qi was having a headache, “Okay, okay, you can go. Be careful.”

Lu Yingying had already walked out of the study room as she casually waved. “I know.”

Fu Yin saw this exchange and thought that Lu Qi was a good brother.

Failing to paint a beauty, Lu Qi changed to draw an old tree. However, he was not satisfied.

“What is going on? Why do my branches look so weird even after I

have tried so many ways? It's just a few broken branches, why is it so difficult to draw?"

Fu Yin muttered to herself softly, "It has nothing to do with the branches."

Lu Qi turned and glared at Fu Yin. "If it is not the branch's problem, then what's the issue?"

Fu Yin did not respond. Lu Qi suddenly became fierce towards her. "Speak!"

"Tree trunk." Fu Yin was shocked and blurted out. "When you draw a tree, you have to gain momentum starting with the trunk. A tree can be upright, slanted, straight or crooked. This is all determined by the tree trunk. You are drawing an old tree and only by using the blunt edge can you illustrate the strength and age of this tree. Moreover, when drawing the trunk, the transition between different strokes has to be particularly clean. That is the only way to demonstrate vigour in different positions and make the painting come to life. If the trunk were to lose its boldness, no matter how many branches you add, it will not matter."

Lu Qi glanced at the painting. "What you say makes sense." He turned and realised that Fu Yin was in a daze again. He became mischievous and silently bumped the side of her body. "You learned to paint before?"

Fu Yin was not staring blankly. Instead, she was recalling the good times when Du Ning taught her how to paint. When she refocused, she realised that Lu Qi's face was extremely close to hers and she reached out to push him away.

Lu Qi grabbed hold of her hand. "Are you trying to rebel?"

"Let go of me. You..." Fu Yin quickly shuffled backwards. "You can't do this..."

Lu Qi wanted to laugh as he asked, "Did you forget that you are a servant in my study room? Not only can I do that, I can also do this." He pulled hard and Fu Yin slammed into his chest.

Fu Yin cried out and knocked over the ink slab, causing Lu Qi's shirt to be stained black.

Lu Qi, who had initially been playing, suddenly got angry. He raised his hand to teach her a lesson. "Stupid brat. I dote on you a little and you show your true self!"

Fu Yin covered her head in fear and she pulled herself into a ball. *Brother Du Ning was better. When she accidentally spilled ink on Brother Du Ning's shirt, he still smiled warmly.*

Lu Qi looked at how sorry she looked and retracted his hand. "Get lost!"

Fu Yin was choking on her tears as she dashed out of the study room and back to her own room.

"Little beauty, who bullied you?" Wiping her tears away, Fu Yin felt her goosebumps. She looked at the door and saw Lu Hanxing looking like he was trying to hold back a laugh.

He entered without permission. "My clothes are torn and I wanted to ask Ling Long to help me to mend it but she was not around."

Fu Yin became guarded. "There are seamstresses in the residence. Why don't you ask them to help you?"

"I am very picky and only appreciate good skills. Ling Long is much better than them. How about you? How are your sewing skills? If you help me mend my clothes, you will gain a lot of benefits." Lu Hanxing's attention shifted to the ink and painting on the table. "Eh? You know how to paint? Is this a picture of the ocean?"

Fu Yin stared at Lu Hanxing's back and looked around. Finally, her gaze landed on a scissors in a bamboo basket. She walked over quietly and picked it up. She slowly approached him.

"You draw pretty well. Did you learn to paint?" Lu Hanxing flipped over a piece. "Eh? Isn't this Lu Qi's picture? All you servants desire to grab the highest branch and give your innocence to Lu Qi. There are several that could be my aunt. Why not..." Unexpectedly, he picked up Lu Qi's picture and turned around.

Fu Yin could not lower her hand in time. Lu Hanxing raised his brows. "What are you doing with the scissors?"

"I..." Fu Yin's gaze shifted. "I want to neaten the sides of the painting before presenting it to Young Master. Young Master has recently been learning to draw and knows that I know how to paint. He became interested and asked me to show him. If you don't have anything else, I need to arrange these paintings."

"I don't have anything else, you can do what you need to do." Lu Hanxing was clearly jealous. "Other than my uncle, Lu Qi is the biggest in this house. If he is waiting for you, I don't dare to hold you back."

Lu Hanxing left and Fu Yin breathed out a long sigh. Determination filled her eyes.

Court Lady

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Du Ning walked out of a wine shop and looked at the street full of people. He suddenly hated the bustle of Chang'an. This city was too big and there were too many people. Finding his lover was like finding a needle in a haystack. Even if he sought her for a lifetime, he might not even encounter her once.

He did not understand why Fu Yin left. If she had despised his background or official status, she could have said it bluntly, and he would not have continued to pester her. If she was worried about losing her freedom after marriage, she should have at least talked to him to give him a chance to straighten things out. Now, he was facing the worst situation. One where he had to guess, with nowhere to start nor end. With feelings that were hard to explain, his gaze swept over the mass of people. He wanted to see her yet he was afraid of finding her.

“Du Ning!”

Du Ning immediately turned to look, only to see a small shopkeeper holding a child. A woman pushed through the crowd to stand in front of the shopkeeper, and they seemed to be arguing. Because of this, it became even more crammed on the streets. He could not locate Fu Yin. Eventually, he suspected that he had missed her too much and imagined her voice. He laughed bitterly to himself before walking in the opposite direction.

He did not see that at a nearby alley, Fu Yin was leaning against a wall. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she covered her mouth tightly.

Fu Yin was out to buy perfume powder for Ling Long and did not expect to see Du Ning. She could not help but call out for him. However, she knew that she could not let herself be found. Because if he had asked, she would have definitely disregarded everything and left with him.

In a single breath, Fu Yin ran back to Duke Chen Residence. She dashed into her room, only to be shocked to see Lu Qi.

Lu Qi saw how her face was red, full of sweat and that she was panting. He laughed, "Where have you gone? You made me wait for so long."

Fu Yin recovered her breathing and saw that Lu Qi was in a good mood. "I went to help Ling Long buy perfume powder."

"Lu Hanxing mentioned you and said that you were tidying up your drawings and said that I instructed you to show them to me." Lu Qi looked at her red face and shiny eyes. *So this was what it meant to have clear and bright eyes.* "When did I say I want to see your drawings? But your drawings are quite nice; especially this drawing of me."

Fu Yin glanced at the drawing that Lu Qi was holding and felt extremely guilty. When she first met Lu Qi, she had casually drawn that so that she could curse at it everyday.

"In Chang'an, there are many women who admire me. However, this is the first time I have seen someone draw me to admire all day." This was why Lu Qi was in a good mood. "Seeing how this painting has more or less demonstrated my handsomeness, I will accept it. I will not punish you for the broken ink slab. Tomorrow, come to the study room to serve me."

Fu Yin's mouth gaped open but she could not say anything. She had once thought that Brother Chumu was crazy. However, Lu Qi was even crazier. His skin must be extremely thick for him to be able to

say something like that.

“Have you fallen in a daze again from joy? Aren’t you going to say anything?”

Fu Yin hesitated for a while before saying, “Thank you for your appreciation...”

Lu Qi treated her like a fool. “Not clever enough. Although you are lacking talent, you can be taught.” He picked up the painting and happily walked off.

Fu Yin wanted to cry and laugh. Surprisingly, the ache in her heart lessened.

In Lizheng Palace, Empress Zhangsun sat in her seat. Wei Song stood behind her while Fu Rou stood by her side.

A palace maid was kneeling in front of her. She was frightened and wanted to cry but did not dare to. She had passed by the Imperial Garden in a frenzy. Fu Rou and Sheng Chuling bumped into her and a packet of rat poison fell out. Sheng Chuling was alert and realised that something was off. He immediately picked up the packet. Everyone knew that it was against the palace rules to bring poison in.

“Your Majesty, I did not have a choice. I am working in the warehouse and there have been a lot of rats recently. I don’t dare to kill them and have broken a lot of pieces of porcelain out of fright. These rats are extremely disgusting and will run around at night. They have broken quite a few pieces of porcelain. I have been beaten numerous times because of this. Chief Cao said that if I break any more things, he will break my legs. When I was young, my house had rats too. We always used white arsenic poison to kill them, so I asked someone to bring a little into the palace just to deal with the rats.”

Empress Zhangsun was expressionless. “Without an Imperial Decree, no one is allowed to bring poison into the palace. When you were learning palace rules in the Office of Rites, did no one teach you this?”

“I...did hear the sisters at the Office of Rites mention it, but...but I really did not intend to harm anyone. If I let the rats continue to roam in the warehouse and break more things, I will be beaten to death. I really did not have any other choice.” The palace maid lifted her sleeve, showing the numerous scars on her arms.

Fu Rou could not stand it. “Your Majesty, there had indeed been an infestation of rats in the palace. Numerous embroideries and accessories in the Seamstress Department have also been affected. I heard them say that the rat infestation in the warehouse is even more serious. When things are broken, the palace maids have to be punished. This palace maid is speaking the truth.”

Empress Zhangsun’s tone did not change. “Tell me. This white arsenic poison was brought in from outside the palace. Who else has seen this?”

The palace maid spoke truthfully, “Internal Attendant Yang from the Internal Attendant Department.”

Fu Rou thought of Yang Bo and her heart skipped a beat.

Wei Song spoke sharply, “In front of Her Majesty, say the full name.”

The palace maid quickly replied, “Understood. It is Internal Attendant Yang Lu. I gave him some money and requested for him to help me when he left the palace. This is really only to deal with the rats. If not, he would not have dared to help me.”

Empress Zhangsun’s expression softened. “I can tell that you are speaking the truth. Given your age and how timid you are, you would not dare to use this poison to harm anyone.”

The palace maid thought that she had averted a crisis and immediately kowtowed. “Thank you, Your Majesty. Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Empress Zhangsun announced calmly, “Since you did not intend to harm anybody, I will reward you with a whole corpse.”

Fu Rou was stunned. “Your Majesty...”

Empress Zhangsun threw Fu Rou a look. Her expression was calm but her eyes were piercing. Fu Rou immediately swallowed what she wanted to say. Her eyes were wide as she watched the palace maid struggle and cry as she was dragged out.

Empress Zhangsun then instructed Wei Song. "The internal attendant, Yang Lu, cannot be spared as well. Flog him to death. Instruct the internal attendants to watch the punishment. Poison is strictly prohibited in the palace. Whoever that wants to touch poison shall have to evaluate how many lives they have to lose first."

Wei Song politely acknowledged before heading out to convey her instructions.

Empress Zhangsun then turned to Fu Rou, "Fu Siyan, you did well today. There are tens of thousands of people in the Royal Palace. Everyone will have their own thoughts. Rules have to be abided by strictly. In the future, if you notice that something is wrong, report it to me immediately."

"Understood." Fu Rou mustered up her courage. "Your Majesty, if I may be so bold to ask..."

"You want to ask why I still took her life even though I knew she did not intend to do any misdeed?" Empress Zhangsun knew what Fu Rou wanted to ask. "In the future, you will understand. Now, I really miss Official Situ. I was angry at that time and punished her to be caned a hundred times without consideration for her age. She died as a result. Every time I think about it, I am filled with sadness. In such a big palace, it will be impossible for me to find another person like her who follows the rules and is not afraid to offend people. She does things by the book."

Fu Rou did not say anything. In her heart, she believed that life is precious. Be it the palace maid or Official Situ. A person's life could be ended so easily. Was this right or wrong?

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Fu Yin arrived outside the study room, she was about to go in when Ling Long held her back.

Ling Long was unhappy. "Is it not enough that you broke one ink slab? Do you want to break another? Hmph, you made me spend half a day cleaning up your mess and I haven't taken it up with you." One of her hands held a teacup while the other pinched Fu Yin's arm.

Lu Qi's voice floated out of the room, "Yin'er, are you out there? What's taking you so long, hurry up and enter."

Ling Long froze as Fu Yin hurried in.

Lu Qi was standing by the table and gestured slowly with his finger. "I called you to come early to serve me, where have you gone? You are a servant, do you think you are a master? You sleep until the sun is up. Be careful or I will hit you with a cane. Come over."

Fu Yin replied, "I filled the water jar before coming over."

Lu Qi frowned. "You are a servant in the study room, why do you need to fill water?"

Fu Yin replied honestly, "Ling Long asked me to fill the water. I fill the water jar in the small garden every day."

Lu Qi suddenly grabbed ahold of Fu Yin's hand and held her wrist. "No wonder you are so skinny. I thought Housekeeper Wu did not feed you enough. So it turns out you are working too much. Listen, from today onwards, you don't have to fill water anymore."

Fu Yin withdrew her hand. "But Ling Long..."

"If Ling Long has any opinions, tell her to talk to me." Lu Qi handed a brush over to Fu Yin. "Take this."

Fu Yin grabbed the brush awkwardly. Lu Qi then pushed her shoulders till she was standing in front of the study table. "Draw."

"Draw? Draw what?"

"Draw an old tree. Didn't you speak very well? Something about a blunt edge and transitions. Draw an old tree for me to see. If you draw it well, I will reward you. If it is not nice..." Lu Qi suddenly stood close onto Fu Yin as he whispered into her ear, "I will punish you."

Fu Yin was shocked as she immediately took one step to the side. She began to draw. Initially, Lu Qi relaxed and drank his tea. He looked at how focused she was and slowly became absorbed.

Not long later, a servant came to deliver an urgent letter. After reading the letter, Lu Qi's expression changed as he knocked the teacup over. He ordered the servant to quickly alert his father. At the same time, he realised that his anger had frightened Fu Yin and dismissed her.

Fu Yin was unsettled as she left the study room. She then saw Ling Long's bitch face.

"Impressive looking but useless. When it comes to serving, he still needs me to do it. Hurry and get lost. Don't embarrass anyone when the Old Master comes!" Ling Long had other thoughts. *Now that she was the only one serving in the study room, wouldn't it be convenient to eavesdrop?*

Very soon, Lu Yunji arrived. When he saw the letter, he did not get angry but laughed instead. "I was stupid. In order to help my

children collect surplus gain, I accepted the valuables that Hong Yide presented and allowed him to live. In the end, the grain did not reach my old family house and it has been stolen by Yan Zifang. Now that Yan Zifang has been offered amnesty and is General Zhenhai, my efforts have gone to waste. As if that wasn't enough, the remnant of Hong Yide's rebel army is also unsettled and has actually gone to Guangzhou. If the Emperor were to know that I privately allowed the rebels to leave, it won't end with me simply going to prison."

Hong Yide is the leader of the rebel army that Lu Yunji annihilated. In order to stay alive, Hong Yide used all his valuables to bribe Lu Yunji. This was the ship that Lu Hanxing was on in Guangzhou previously. Alas, Yan Zifang had robbed them. Lu Yunji was guilty and thought that Fu Rou would be able to see through them. Hence, he wanted to kill Fu Rou to silence her, resulting in the huge fire at the Fu Residence.

Lu Yunji immediately instructed Lu Qi to write to Guangzhou telling them that pirates were hiding in the city and to search for them. When they found Hong Yide, they were to kill him immediately.

As the two of them spoke, Ling Long came to serve tea. She walked gracefully and offered tea in a well-behaved manner.

Lu Yunji saw this and waited for her to leave before asking Lu Qi what he was intending to do regarding taking a concubine.

Lu Qi pursed his lips in the direction that Ling Long had gone. "I wanted to promote her, but she lacks tolerance. None of the pictures given to me have also caught my eye."

"Women are simply used to give birth to children. Moreover, it is just for the position of concubine. You should not be so picky. Just take one. In the future, if another one catches your eye, you can just take them as well. You are my son. Look at your status. You can have as many women as you want. The most important thing is their ability to bear you sons and spread your branches. This is the only way our Lu family can continue to thrive for generations. Yingying's marriage situation has been paved with hardships. Your expectations are too high. You don't like this, don't approve of that. I am still looking forward to having grandchildren."

Lu Qi laughed, "Father don't worry. I know what to do."

Lu Yunji stood up and massaged his own waist. "It is impossible not to acknowledge my old age. It is time for me to worry about my children. Your aunt wrote a letter to me to ask me to help Hanxing with marriage. This sister-in-law of mine became a widow early. It has not been easy for her to raise Hanxing. Hanxing lost his father since he was young and has been following me. Naturally, I will have a say in his marriage. In my opinion, Assistant Minister Zhao's daughter might be a good match."

"The one full of pimple scars and stutters?" Lu Qi was surprised. "I am afraid Hanxing--"

"So what if she has pimple scars and stutters? When one is looking for a wife, what they want is a gentle and considerate lady. After all, he can take concubines. Assistant Minister Zhao comes from an aristocrat family and has a good official position. In the future, he will be able to lead a ministry. Ultimately, it is Hanxing who gets the good connections and our Lu family needs this marriage." Lu Yunji switched the topic and looked at Lu Qi. "You can choose your own concubines. However, your official wife has to be the princess. With the Emperor's appreciation for you as well as my contributions to Great Tang, it is still reasonable to ask for the princess' hand. You better not learn from that useless Sheng Chumu. He actually behaved so impudently because of a commoner girl. He even dared to reject the Emperor's offer to marry Princess Xinnan. You can like any girl you please but you definitely cannot marry her as your official wife. Understand?"

Lu Qi did not hesitate to express that he understood.

Ling Long heard everything from outside the study room. She immediately went to find Lu Hanxing.

"I heard something about a rebel leader named Yi. Old Master received a lot of valuables from him and secretly let him go. Now, that person is unsettled and started to make a move once again. They were discussing how to get rid of him." Ling Long sat on Lu Hanxing's thigh.

“Is his name Hong Yide?”

Ling Long nodded. “Yes, I think so.”

“No wonder.” Lu Hanxing came to a realisation. “I was wondering how they got so much money after quelling the rebel army. They even managed to fill several huge crates and were going to send them back home secretly. It was an illegal transaction.”

Ling Long casted a side glance. “Oh right, I also have to congratulate you. You are going to marry. I heard Old Master say that he managed to settle a marriage between you and Assistant Minister Zhao’s daughter.”

“Assistant Minister Zhao? What? His daughter is literally the ugliest girl in the capital!”

Ling Long laughed. “Yes, the ugly one. She has pimple scars all over her face and even stutters. Old Master said that the Lu family needs this marriage.”

Lu Hanxing exclaimed, “If the Lu family needs this marriage then why don’t Lu Qi marry her? Why must I be the one to marry her?”

“Lu Qi is Old Master’s biological son. What are you? Officially, you are his nephew but you are actually just a subordinate.”

Seeing how Lu Hanxing’s expression changed, Ling Long grabbed onto his neck and acted cute. “I am not the one that made you angry, don’t take your anger out on me. Don’t be anxious. The marriage with Assistant Minister Zhao’s daughter cannot be settled within two or three days. You can take your time to discuss it. Now, I have good news for you.”

Lu Hanxing was suspicious. “What good news?”

“Haven’t you got your eye on Yin’er? I am a generous person and decided to let you try her.” Ling Long had realised that Lu Qi was starting to care more and more about Yin’er.

Lu Hanxing could see through her. “Don’t think I don’t know what you are planning. She is serving Lu Qi’s study room. If I do something

to her, Lu Qi will give me trouble.”

“You are his cousin. Even if he creates trouble for you, it will just be a fight or a scolding. Can he really kill you? When the time comes, you can just say that Yin’er was the one that seduced you. When she is dirty, Young Master will no longer care for her. He might even give her to you. Let’s make it clear. This is not just for me. I am doing this for you too. If Yin’er gains more of his favour, how will I be able to hold my position in the study room? If I lose my position, how will I help you get information? Even if you cry, you won’t be able to find out anything.”

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Fu Yin had once again been summoned to Lu Qi's study room. He had just sent out two letters of high importance and could finally relax. He wanted her to massage his legs. She hesitated before beginning to massage his legs. As she saw him close his eyes comfortably, she could not help but think of her mother and used more strength.

Lu Qi opened his eyes and frowned. "What did your family used to do?" *How were her hands so strong?*

"They had a business..." Fu Yin subconsciously replied.

"What kind of business?" Lu Qi continued to ask.

"We sold..." Fu Yin did not dare to tell the truth. "...calligraphy items."

"No wonder you know how to draw. You are considered a lady of a merchant. How did you end up selling yourself to the Duke Chen Residence?"

"Our business went bankrupt and we owed a lot of money. My parents could not take it and abandoned me. I went to my distant uncle for help but my aunt said I was unlucky. She scolded and hit me everyday. Eventually, she sold me." Fu Yin made something up.

Lu Qi assessed Fu Yin for a moment before pulling his legs back.

“Have you never helped anyone massage their legs before? It is not comfortable at all.”

Fu Yin took the chance to leave. “If Young Master has no other orders for me...”

“I have.” Lu Qi did not let her leave. “Sing a song for me.”

“I don’t know how to sing.” She was born fortunate and never had to worry about clothes or food. She also never had to sell the arts to survive.

Lu Qi wanted to laugh. “You are clumsy at serving tea, don’t know how to massage, don’t know how to sing. You are incredibly useless except for one thing. You know how to draw. Go and draw then.”

“Draw what?” Fu Yin did not refuse.

“Mmhm, draw me.” Lu Qi proudly pointed at himself. “You drew me in secret, now I am giving you the chance to draw me properly. You should be grateful.”

Fu Yin looked at how Lu Qi posed in a manner that he thought was handsome as she nervously picked up her brush. As she drew, he commented. He would suddenly say that he wanted to look powerful and in another moment, he would comment that his eyes were not big enough. She fumed and drew huge exaggerated eyes for him.

Lu Qi closed in on her, forcing her to the corner of the room. Both his arms locked her in, making it impossible for her to escape. “You did that on purpose?”

She glared at him with eyes that looked like a rabbit’s. “When did I...”

“Your eyes are so big and so bright...” Unknowingly, Lu Qi became absorbed and shifted closer. Fu Yin was frightened but could not avoid him.

Lu Qi grabbed onto Fu Yin’s chin and said in a seducing voice. “Please me and you can get anything you want.”

Lu Qi was about to get intimate with Fu Yin when Fu Yin pushed him away roughly. She ran to her room. He was furious before slowly becoming interested. She clearly admired him but chose to remain shy like a rabbit. She was so cute that it made his heart tickle. He did not mind slowly pursuing her.

The Royal Palace was gloomy. A single lamp shone on a small paper boat. Fu Rou placed her palms together as she prayed.

Two lives were lost in silence. Many people in the palace were pitiful people that had their family relationships cut off. The least she could do would be to light a lamp for them to show them that there was someone that remembered them and wished them to have a smooth road ahead.

“Li Chun’er from Jiangling County.”

Fu Rou was startled as she turned back. She saw Prince Zhou walk up. Prince Zhou said, “If you want to pray for the deceased, you should at least know their name.”

“How did you know...” Fu Rou only managed to ask half of her question before she chuckled bitterly, “I always forget that Your Highness has a huge network in the palace. There is nothing that you don’t know.”

“I typically do not care about trivial matters. However, since this is related to you, I can’t help but be slightly concerned.” Prince Zhou did not mind telling the truth. “Are you feeling sad?”

“Yes. I never thought that it would end like this.” In a normal common household, this would be a trivial and insignificant issue. But in the Royal Family’s household, it was worth someone’s life.

“Li Chun’er also never thought that using white arsenic to poison rats would cause her to lose her life.” Prince Zhou pursed his lips. His tone was surprisingly cold. “Don’t you find it interesting?”

Fu Rou was horrified. “It is so tragic. How can it be interesting?”

“By interesting, I am referring to how unpredictable human life can be. Just like this, a person’s fate has been completely changed. Right from the beginning, you would never have imagined things to end like this.” *To be born in the Royal family is actually a kind of sorrow.* “When I was young, I once fell into a pond and almost drowned. Did you know who saved me?”

Fu Rou shook her head.

“The Crown Prince.” He would remember this for life.

“His Highness, the Crown Prince?” Seeing how frigid the brothers were to each other, Fu Rou did not expect this. “He saved your life?”

Prince Zhou’s gaze became distant. “That was when we were young. At that time, I still called him Elder Brother and he called me Third Brother. When he saw me fall into the water, he did not hesitate to jump into the water to save me. He almost drowned as well. Sometimes I think that if I had drowned then, he would have remembered me as his obedient and cute third brother and not the Prince Zhou that is forever posing problems for him.”

“Then why...” Fu Rou could not understand.

“Because of what Master Yuan said.” His life changed completely since then.

“The Master Yuan that is renowned for physiognomy and received His Majesty’s recognition?” Fu Rou remembered him.

“Yes, that person. He looked at me and said that my fate was noble beyond belief.” Prince Zhou wanted to laugh. “Noble beyond belief. To the Royal family, these words are fatal! From that day onwards, I unknowingly became the Crown Prince’s opponent. He was no longer my Elder Brother and I was no longer the Third Brother he would risk his life to protect. Fu Siyan, you feel pain because of that palace maid’s death. But do you know the true pain?” *It is to be blood related yet ruthless.*

Fu Rou looked at the paper boat that was slowly sinking into the water. “I thought Your Highness was here to comfort me. However,

the more you speak, the more heavy I feel.”

“Fu Siyan, your feelings are all on Sheng Chumu. I will lose out if I comfort you. I won’t be able to get my deposit back.” Prince Zhou smiled slightly. He was the one that wanted her comfort. “I am just treating you as my verbal bin. Whenever I don’t feel comfortable, I will dump all my troubles on you. That way, I will feel more at ease.”

“On what basis are you to treat me as your verbal bin?”

“You feel wronged? Then that’s easy. Ditch Sheng Chumu and come with me. I promise that I will never bother you with my troubles anymore. If you have troubles, I will even cheer you up and help you solve them.”

Fu Rou was speechless and turned to leave. However, Prince Zhou held her back. She anxiously turned around. “What are you doing?”

He asked, “Did you know when I started admiring you?” Fu Rou shook her head.

“It was when you helped Official Situ in the Eastern Palace. After that, the Crown Princess approached you in the Imperial Garden and asked you why you helped Official Situ. You then replied to her with one sentence. You were not that kind of person and will not help with that kind of thing.” Prince Zhou remembered everything.

“That is nothing. I am simply stating the truth.”

“You are wilful and are not willing to be changed by the world. However, this world has a lot of temptations and a lot of obstacles. When facing temptations and obstacles, it is extremely extremely difficult to remain like oneself from the start to the end. Therefore, there are many that cannot persist and will unknowingly lose themselves. They will do things that they would never do in the past.”

Prince Zhou’s gaze deepened. “Continue being yourself. Although you may seem rigid and indiscreet by refusing to be changed by the world, I like you. I really really like you.” He finally confessed.

The Palace was as deep as the ocean. So was the Lu family. On this night, the Duke Chen Residence was eerie.

Fu Yin was walking in the garden by herself. The wind felt cold through the thin clothes she was wearing. Ling Long had suddenly complained of a stomach ache and angrily chased her out, demanding that she find Housekeeper Wu.

Her surroundings were pitch black, with only a few lanterns swaying in the corridor. The candles in the lantern suddenly extinguished, making it even more strange. She was cowardly and her footsteps quickened. She wanted to quickly get through the garden. Suddenly, she felt herself brush past a black figure. The black figure pounced on her and covered her mouth, pulling her along into a junk room.

The moonlight illuminated that person's face. Fu Yin starred in fright. It was Lu Hanxing. She cried out and struggled, realising that she had fallen into a trap.

Lu Hanxing smiled evilly, his gaze was like a wolf. "Don't be scared, beautiful lady. Tonight, I will show you what bliss is like--"

Shashashasha! Lu Hanxing heard a noise from outside the door and could not help but be startled.

A moment later, a cat meowed.

Disappointment flashed through Fu Yin's eyes. She could not move under Lu Hanxing's grip and could not stop him from tearing apart her lapel and taking advantage of her snow-white neck. At this moment, Fu Yin took the chance to bite Lu Hanxing with all her might and managed to free herself as she ran to the window and shouted for help.

Lu Hanxing pulled her back and slapped her, causing her to fall to the ground. "Bitch. You will only behave when I am harsh on you. See how I will punish you!"

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Lu Hanxing sat on her as his gaze was menacing. Both his hands were ready to tear apart her already torn lapel. Fu Yin used all her energy to grab onto Lu Hanxing's hands, refusing to let go.

The door suddenly opened. Lu Qi rushed in and roared, "What are you doing?!" He took one step forward and pulled Lu Hanxing up. With one kick, he sent Lu Hanxing flying out of the door. Lu Qi then followed up with a punch.

Fu Yin was disheveled as she got up, gripping tightly onto her lapel. She saw Ling Long poke her head in, her face delighted by what she was seeing.

"I was thinking why you were not sleeping at such a late hour and went out without saying anything? Young Master treats you so well, yet you fool around with other men. Slut."

Fu Yin pounced onto Ling Long furiously. "I did not! You were the one that set me up!" *Why? She had nothing against Ling Long. Why did Ling Long want to hurt her?*

Ling Long did not back off but instead fought back. She pulled Fu Yin's hair, frantically slapping her. Meanwhile, Lu Hanxing had taken a few of Lu Qi's punches and was furious. He started to fight back.

"Lu Hanxing, you touched my servant and you dare to retaliate?" Lu

Qi was not paying attention for a moment and got hit. He was in disbelief.

“Lu Qi, all you got is a good father. What is so impressive about you? You can’t even secure your own servant and you are blaming me? If you are capable, she would not have come to find me in the middle of the night. You cannot do anything if we are both willing!” Lu Hanxing threw caution to the wind.

Lu Qi was burning with anger and did not hold back. All of a sudden, Fu Yin’s heart wrenching wail caused him to stop punching Lu Hanxing for a moment and dash to the room.

Fu Yin and Ling Long were fighting and Ling Long had pushed Fu Yin down. Fu Yin’s bracelet was smashed.

Lu Qi turned back to see that Lu Hanxing had escaped. He snorted and turned to Ling Long. “What is going on?”

Ling Long pretended to cry. “This slut was in the wrong and became angry to hide her embarrassment. She even scratched my face. You have to stand up for me.”

Lu Qi threw Ling Long’s hand off. “It is the middle of the night, what is there to stand up for? If there is anything, we will settle it tomorrow. Go back and sleep.”

Ling Long bit her lip and glared at Fu Yin before turning to leave.

Lu Qi looked at Fu Yin. Her hair and clothes were in a mess. The skin at the corners of her lips were torn and fresh blood flowed. It caused the coldness in his eyes to dissipate.

He took off his own outer coat and gently placed it on Fu Yin. He never knew that he could behave so gently. However, his tone remained icy, “Hurry up and get back to your room. You have no sense of shame and made me lose face. Are you going to sit like this until the sun is up so everyone can see you?”

Fu Yin did not spare Lu Qi a glance and he stormed off. She held her face and cried. She cried for the humiliation she felt that night and for the gift her mother left for her. Sorrow permeated through her.

She did not know how much time had passed before she finally stopped crying. She carefully picked up the two broken parts of the bracelet. Initially, she hated Ling Long, who kept trying to hurt her, and Lu Hanxing, who was shameless. However, she slowly hated herself for being weak. She could not even deal with these pathetic people, so much for wanting to take revenge.

She thought about a lot of things. Her mother's wish for her to marry into an official's family as well as Lu Qi and his interest in her. A sinister feeling rose in her. Actually, power was readily available. She would borrow strength to fight and catch them off guard. The only thing was--she had to give up on herself!

The expression in Fu Yin's eyes changed. She held the broken bracelet in a death grip. "Mother, there are so many evil people in this world. Those that hurt you and those that hurt me. I don't care what I have to do to kill them. I am willing to do all it takes."

Lu Qi lay on his bed and could not fall asleep. His entire head was filled with Fu Yin. The more he thought about it, the more angry he got. He had really misjudged her. He thought that with her dumb and dazed look, she was innocent and cute. Who would have known that she would harbour such intentions and hook up with anyone. She almost tricked him.

All of a sudden, the door creaked open. Lu Qi got up in surprise and reached for the sword hanging on his bed frame. Light reflected off the sword, illuminating Fu Yin's beautiful face.

Lu Qi narrowed his eyes before snorting. "What are you doing here?"

Fu Yin's steps were light and determined. "I came to address the injustice I suffered."

Lu Qi looked at her. Her translucent cotton dress hinted at her delicate figure. He immediately understood as his expression sunk. "When dirty things get exposed, everyone involved will cry out that they are innocent. I have no energy to bother. You can fool around with whoever you want, it is your problem. Don't stick out like a sore

thumb in front of me.” *Did she think he was desperate and was willing to take anyone?*

Fu Yin’s expression remained calm. “I have proof. I can prove my innocence.”

Lu Qi’s eyes flashed. “What evidence?”

Her dress fell to the floor. With not a single thread covering her body, she walked slowly towards Lu Qi.

“Myself. I am the best evidence.”

“Don’t go anywhere, wait for me--” Du Ning’s warm voice faded away.

Fu Yin felt like crying but did not dare to cry. She could only throw herself into this man’s arms and close her eyes. She felt the warmth of a stranger and could not help but tremble.

Lu Qi waved his sleeve, extinguishing the light from the lamp.

The day had just begun to brighten. Lu Qi opened his eyes and saw Fu Yin still in deep sleep. He took notice of the slight redness under her eyes. Her doll-like face was pale.

Perhaps she had cried because of the grievance she felt or maybe he had tired her out. He reached out. His huge palm lightly wrapped around half her face. His thumb stroked her face longingly; his actions were tender.

He finally knew that this blur servant of his had no ability to seduce.

“Young Master, it is time to get up.” Ling Long pushed open the door and walked in, carrying a copper basin for him to wash his face.

Fu Yin frowned and her eyelashes fluttered. Lu Qi immediately shushed her.

Ling Long thought that Lu Qi wanted to laze in bed. “It is almost 8am. Young Master, aren’t you going to train--” She turned back and

immediately fell silent.

With one hand rubbing her eyes, and the other holding onto the blanket, Fu Yin's black hair spread over her bare shoulder.

A loud crash resounded as the copper basin fell from Ling Long's hands.

Lu Qi smiled warmly and pressed onto Fu Yin who was about to get up. He turned around and spoke coldly to Ling Long, "What are you doing? Who are you angry at first thing in the morning?"

Ling Long stammered, "She...she..."

"What about her?" Lu Qi grabbed onto the blanket and pulled it up, covering Fu Yin's naked shoulder. "She is innocent, I already checked. It is undeniable. Lu Hanxing, that bastard, I will deal with him later. And you, you clearly didn't know anything, why did you spout nonsense and ruin Yin'er's reputation. In the future, Yin'er belongs to my room. You should learn to be discreet. I am fair and will settle things unbiasedly, I will not neglect anyone. If you dare to bully her, don't blame me for teaching you a lesson. Do you hear me?"

Fu Yin spoke weakly, "Don't make things difficult for Sister Ling Long. The past is just a misunderstanding." Ling Long was wilful and Fu Yin could see very clearly that Lu Qi did not like that. Fu Yin knew how to cater to his appetite.

Lu Qi was satisfied and lightly squeezed Fu Yin's cheeks. "Yin'er is so obedient. I hate it when people create trouble. Forget about anything bad that has happened before and get along well with Ling Long. I will definitely dote on you."

"Yes, I will listen to you." Fu Yin smiled as she used her elbow to support herself. "Let me help you wash up."

Lu Qi pressed on her, his voice full of adoration. "I don't need you. Sleep for a while more. Ling Long is still here, she is used to serving me." He turned back to look at Ling Long, his face stoic. "Aren't you going to quickly fetch another basin of water?"

Ling Long resentfully picked up the copper basin and headed out. She never thought that her plan to gain an advantage would backfire and she would end off worse than when she first started. *Alas, that stupid brat had a motive. So much for pretending to be innocent.*

Lu Qi got up and dressed himself.

Fu Yin turned around and tears silently rolled down her cheeks. Her heart was filled with sorrow. She had bidden goodbye to herself. There was no turning back.

Sigh. Fu Yin, oh Fu Yin. Are any of you guys watching the drama? They did such a good job with the scene in episode 22. I was really surprised!

Hope no one is hating anyone really badly atm. They're actually all pitiful characters, even if they appear really despicable at first.

Court Lady

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Lu Hanxing kneeled in front of Lu Yunji. He was indignant but did not express it. Instead, he pretended to be extremely remorseful of his actions.

Lu Yunji took a sip of his tea before saying, “Get up, this is nothing serious.”

“Uncle, although you think this way, I still feel that I have let Lu Qi down. You have warned me numerous times to not let my lust get the better of me. Yet, after drinking too much yesterday night, I saw a beautiful servant in the garden. I did not stop to think...luckily Lu Qi came in time to stop me. It was only then did I realise that she was the maid from his study.” Lu Hanxing did not dare to stand up.

Lu Qi snorted, “You only found out after? It is not Yin’er’s first day in our residence. How can you not know who she serves? You are always up to no good in our residence. Now that you have offended me...”

Lu Yunji cut him off. “Don’t harp on it. She is simply a slightly more beautiful servant. Hanxing has already acknowledged his mistake and you have already hit him. This matter shall end here. You are not allowed to use this to make things difficult for Hanxing in the future, do you understand?”

Lu Qi was depressed but did not dare to challenge his father’s

decision. He reluctantly agreed.

“Thank you, Uncle.” Lu Hanxing finally got up. He raised his head and smirked at Lu Qi.

Lu Qi found his smile annoying. It was as if Lu Hanxing was challenging him.

Lu Yunji did not notice this. “Hanxing is at the age where he is young and vigorous. It is no wonder he makes the mistake of chasing after girls. Ultimately, it is my fault as your uncle. Your mother has sent me several letters asking me to settle on a marriage for you. In these past two years, many things have happened, resulting in the delay of this matter. Recently, I have been looking around and have settled on a family. Assistant Minister Zhao’s daughter is from a good background and has a decent upbringing. She will be a good wife and loving mother.”

Lu Qi noticed the abrupt change in Lu Hanxing’s expression, and his mood suddenly improved.

“Uncle, I am in no rush...” Lu Hanxing wanted to take things slow.

Lu Yunji continued, “You are foolish to say this. Although you are in no hurry, your mother is. As the son-in-law of Assistant Minister Zhao, it will greatly benefit your career.”

Lu Hanxing brought up his mother. “We should send a picture of the Zhao family’s daughter to my mother and let her decide.”

Lu Yunji’s expression did not change. “I have already written a letter to your mother. She asked me to make the decision. I think we should settle on the Zhao family’s daughter.”

“Uncle!” Lu Hanxing blurted out, “That person is so ugly. I do not want to marry her!”

Waves of unhappiness could be detected from Lu Yunji’s tone. “Oh? You are not willing?”

Lu Hanxing mustered up his courage. “Marrying someone as my wife affects my entire life. Once I marry her, I have to face her everyday. I

don't wish to marry someone so ugly. She has to at least be pleasant to the eyes. She can't be so ugly that the entire Chang'an will treat me as a joke."

Lu Yunji's eyes were icy. "You really think this way?"

Lu Hanxing trembled slightly before gritting his teeth and replying, "This matter concerns my future happiness. I think that we should be more cautious."

"Are you saying that I am not being careful?"

Lu Hanxing still could not detect his uncle's emotions but his knees weakened in fright. "I do not dare to think that way."

Lu Yunji sighed, "If you think that way, I cannot blame you. Your father passed away so long ago and I have always treated you like my son. I never thought that this day would come. After all, we are not directly related. I am an old man and want to interfere in everything. I am even bothering about my nephew's marriage. No wonder I am being despised. Every man aspires to make their own mark, I should not hold you back. From today onwards, you are relieved from your military officer duties. Lu Hanxing, you are to leave my residence."

Lu Hanxing fell to a kneel as he shouted, "Uncle!"

Lu Qi sneered, "Congratulations, Cousin. You can finally choose your own wife. I never even dared to wish to be so free."

Lu Yunji continued, "The sky is high for birds to fly. You can fly. Didn't you despise Assistant Minister Zhao's daughter for being ugly and that you are unwilling to marry her? I would like to see if the people in Chang'an will treat you as a joke without me as your uncle. Get out. You can leave and find your pleasant looking wife. In the future, no matter how great you become, you will not be related to my Duke Chen Residence."

"Uncle, please do not be angry. I know my mistake! Marriage is a big thing and one's parents should make the decision. Uncle, you are like a father to me. I will marry whomever you want me to marry."

Lu Qi jeered, "That's right. In a marriage, what is important is that

the girl is virtuous. Who cares if she is a little ugly? With my father as your backing and Assistant Minister Zhao as your father-in-law, Cousin, you are extremely fortunate. You should know how blessed you are.”

“I am indeed fortunate, I was foolish for a moment.”

Lu Yunji helped Lu Hanxing up. “You are someone that has been through a battlefield. Yet, you still become depressed over such a small matter. Be happy. The Duke Chen Residence is finally going to have a marriage. We will choose an auspicious date and I will personally bring you to the Zhao Residence to request for marriage.”

Lu Hanxing walked away dejectedly. Lu Qi pursed his lips, “That brat can only serve our Lu family for his entire life.”

Lu Yunji did not approve of his words. “What are you saying? You also have the surname Lu, if you don’t serve the Lu family, then who are you serving? And you.”

“Me?” Lu Qi could not react in time.

“Hanxing’s marriage has been settled, you are next.” Lu Yunji narrowed his eyes. This was of utmost importance.

On this day, Yan Zifang was on duty when he passed by an alley and heard a girl scream for help. He knew that there were good and bad people even under the Emperor’s watch and people should not meddle with other people’s business. Moreover, he used to be a pirate and did not want to create trouble.

Unexpectedly, Ma Haihu could not stand it. He could not stand to see the weak getting bullied and stepped forward to take a look.

Lian Yan'er was the girl that screamed for help. She was a famous courtesan in all of Chang'an. She was close to Sheng Chumu when he was still a playboy. Now that Sheng Chumu was devoted to Fu Rou, she had left the scene. However, it was easy to leave the scene but not easy to find a new life. She was frequently judged by those around her. When she met with someone familiar, they were often

not someone she could nod and greet. She had to hide from them in fear. Even when she came out to buy things, she had to take a more secluded road. Unfortunately, today she met with two of her biggest headaches. They were people she could not offend and absolutely hated, the Emperor's son-in-law, Du He, and an Official's son, Zhang He. When compared to Sheng Chumu and his two brothers, Sheng Chumu and his brothers were considered good and pure.

When Ma Haihu dashed out, Lian Yan'er was startled. She did not think that anyone would dare to go against these two.

When Zhang He and Du He found out that Ma Haihu was a military officer in General Zhenhai's army, they laughed. In Chang'an, any random person would have a position higher than a military officer. What they did not expect was although Ma Haihu's rank was trivial, he had enormous guts. When he saw that he could not get through to them with words, he used his fists to greet them.

Yan Zifang waited for a while. However, as he saw that Ma Haihu had yet to come back, he naturally went to look for him and joined in the fight. The fight grew and came to the attention of an Official's son who was patrolling the city, Xu Liangping.

Xu Liangping was cowardly and Zhang He's father was his supervisor. Moreover, the Emperor's son-in-law was also involved. He knew which side he should stand on and immediately asked his guards to capture and beat up Yan Zifang and Ma Haihu.

Lian Yan'er could not bear to see them get beaten up and shouted for them to stop.

Zhang He slapped her. "How dare you make a sound. It is all because you don't know how to appreciate favours, you bitch!"

Ma Haihu shouted, "Stop it! If you dare, come at me. What's the point in hitting a lady?"

Zhang He snorted, "You already look like a bear and you dare to argue! Official Xu, what are you waiting for? Quickly drag them away, let them have a taste of prison food. They think they can do over their lives now that they have stepped on land and gained their

freedom. Wishful thinking. Wait until your next life to try again.”

Du He clapped and hooted. All of a sudden, he saw a familiar face in the crowd. The person had pleasant eyes and looked carefree. It was Concubine Yan’s internal attendant, Yu He, and he was giving Du He a look. Concubine Yan was the Emperor’s beloved consort. Even if Du He did not want to be bothered with him, he had to show some manners. He walked over to Yu He.

Yu He spoke, “If I did not come in time, you were about to make a huge mistake.”

The names are so similar and confusing in English. Haha...so many "He". Hehehe! LOLLOL

This scene may seem insignificant, but remember this is how Lian Yan'er meets Ma Haihu.

Yu He is the eunuch that serves Concubine Yan.

I would suggest watching [episode 22](#) for a better understanding. The drama did a very good job on episode 22 to prepare you guys for what's to come in the future.

Hope you guys are enjoying the story so far! I know some parts are very fast paced, and may seem confusing, but it will all come together at the end.

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“Eunuch, are you trying to scare me? He is just General Zhenhai, can’t I teach him a lesson?” Du He did not think so.

“General Zhenhai is nothing compared to your status as a consort. Of course, you can teach him however you want. But if you are also going to teach the Emperor a lesson, then things will not be good.” Yu He smiled, an unfathomable look crossed his face.

Du He froze. “When did I teach the Emperor a lesson?”

“With regard to the Four Seas Sect pledging allegiance, the Emperor even awarded a pirate like Yan Zifang with the title of General Zhenhai. His Majesty specially settled them down in Chang’an as an expression of his generosity. The Emperor believes that Yan Zifang is able to change for the better. Yet, you ask people to capture Yan Zifang and even want to imprison him. Aren’t you embarrassing General Zhenhai? No, you are embarrassing the Emperor. With this scene that you created, are you trying to entrap Yan Zifang or are you trying to say that His Majesty has misjudged Yan Zifang? If the Emperor hears about this and starts to investigate, you will be the only one at fault. Ultimately, you will be the one that is punished.”

Du He woke up to reality and immediately asked the guards to stop. He then sneered at Yan Zifang, “Count yourselves lucky, I will let you all go this time.” He pulled Zhang He along and left.

Xu Liangping was delighted that he would not offend either party and left.

Yan Zifang knew clearly what had happened and went to thank Yu He. "I wonder how I may address you."

Yu He's smile reached his eyes. "My name is Yu He. I serve Concubine Yan in the Royal Palace."

Yan Zifang was wondering why Du He let him go. It turned out with every tall mountain, there was a taller mountain.

"Eunuch Yu, thank you for saving us."

"It is a small matter not worth mentioning." Yu He changed the topic. "I saw the embroidery of foreign ships in the palace. It is extremely interesting. I asked around and found out that it was based on the blueprints of foreign ships that General Yan had presented to His Majesty. I have always yearned for the ocean and wanted to find an opportunity to seek your guidance. I never thought that I would meet you today."

"You have done me a huge favour. In the future, if you have any questions about the ocean, you can look for me. I will always welcome you." Yan Zifang cupped his fist.

Yu He did not stand on courtesy. "Okay, I will definitely pay you a visit in the future. I still have things to do. I will take my leave." He took a step before stopping. "General Yan, I have something that I don't know if I should say."

Yan Zifang replied politely, "Please go ahead."

"It is difficult to establish oneself without a backing in Chang'an." Seeing Yan Zifang frown, Yu He smiled. "This is just a reminder out of goodwill. I did not mean anything else."

After Yu He left, Yan Zifang fell into deep thought.

When Yan Zifang finally finished his duty, he walked into a wine house and called for a jar of wine. He drank alone, feeling slightly down. When he was a pirate fighting for justice, people despised him.

Now that he pledged his loyalty to the court, there were still people looking down on him. In Chang'an, although he was standing on concrete ground, his heart was still unsteady. It was worse than when he was sailing.

"Stop drinking." A fair hand pressed onto the side of the wine jar.

"Take your hand off." Yan Zifang did not need to lift his head to know who it was. *Why does she always appear in front of him?*

Lu Yingying did not care about Yan Zifang's cold tone and sat down calmly. "How did you injure yourself?"

Yan Zifang glared at her icily, "Don't come near me." *Why's she so clueless? Her father had killed his entire family, did she expect him to greet her with a smile?*

Lu Yingying was simply oblivious. "It is my decision whether to go near you or not. Even though I know that you wanted to kill me before, you could not bear to do it. You could have also hurt me on the day that we were outside the city, but you did not hesitate to let me go." She even took his wine jar away. "You are injured, you shouldn't be drinking."

Yan Zifang did not allow her to make the decision as he stretched his muscular arm across, taking the wine jar back and pouring himself a cup.

Lu Yingying wanted to take it away but Yan Zifang grabbed hold of her wrist.

"Stop it! Why are you always trying to get close to me? I am a pirate that everyone looks down on. You are the daughter of a high-ranking duke. Our families have a blood feud. Don't think that just because I cannot do anything to you all now, I am a toy for you all to play with. I am not a cat or dog that you can provoke!"

"I do not think that way." His grip made Lu Yingying frown.

"Then what are you thinking? Could it be that you really like me?" Yan Zifang scoffed.

Lu Yingying froze before casually admitting, "Yes, I like you."

It was Yan Zifang's turn to be taken aback. "What a joke." He suddenly released his grip before throwing down a silver tael and walking out.

Lu Yingying sat there in a daze as she bit onto her lip. All the courage that she had stored since she was born was used to confess to him. Yet, she had failed miserably. Although she had expected this, her heart still aches as if it was being torn apart. People were greedy. It is not enough that they liked someone. They wish for the other party to reciprocate despite knowing that there was a huge uncrossable gap between them.

She picked up the cup of wine and downed it. Coughing violently, tears started flowing uncontrollably down her face.

Yan Zifang forced himself to not turn around. He knew she was innocent. Yet, every time he saw her, he would think of the huge snowfall that year and his parent's bodies. How could she have any place in his heart?!

Yan Zifang walked too quickly and bumped into someone as he was leaving the wine house. "Sor--" He was about to apologise but the person left too quickly. The person even shielded his face with the bamboo hat that he had on.

In front of that man, was a group of men. They were all wearing bamboo hats and were in a rush. They fluttered like ash, as if they did not want to attract anyone's attention. However, their behaviour made everyone want to avoid them as the crowd walked to the side to let the group past.

Yan Zifang did not stare at them for long since he was feeling troubled. He was also afraid that Lu Yingying would cling onto him and he would not be able to escape. Hence, he walked in the opposite direction. He never would have known that he had just brushed shoulders with his old friend.

The one leading the group was Hong Yide, a person who the Lu father and son pair wanted to kill.

The Lu father and son pair thought that Hong Yide was still in Guangzhou. They did not know that his real motive was to get revenge against Great Tang's Emperor, Li Shimin. Of course, they would have to be in the city that the Emperor was in. However, Hong Yide did not know that the reason why he could come to Chang'an so easily was because of the person that was holding back the Lu army, Fu Tao. Fu Tao was helping Hong Yide to cover his tracks.

In Guangzhou, Fu Tao created a great fanfare of how they were there to catch the rebel troops. After he silenced Hong Yide's subordinates, he falsely reported back. He intentionally let Hong Yide create trouble near Lu Yunji. It would be for the best if Hong Yide could tear open their base.

Although Yan Zifang did not recognise Hong Yide, Hong Yide had seen Yan Zifang. He disapproved of Yan Zifang's decision to pledge allegiance to the Royal Court. However, he was too lazy to hate on Yan Zifang. Hence, he lowered his head and went in the opposite direction.

As mentioned in the previous release, you guys should watch episode 22 on youtube. There are many characters in this chapter and it may seem very confusing.

Just in case you guys are confused, Hong Yide was supposed to have been killed by Lu Yunji. But he bribed Lu Yunji with all a lot of treasures to live. Those were the treasures that Lu Hanxing, the nephew, was supposed to be in charge of at the beginning of the novel when Fu Rou's Third Madam bumped into those guys at the harbour (this was before the pirates stole everything). That was why the Fu Residence was set on fire. They were trying to cover the tracks.

Now, Hong Yide is back and wants to get revenge on the emperor.

Fu Tao (Fu Rou's bro) gained Lu Yunji and Lu Qi's trust. But he still wants revenge, so when he found out that Hong Yide escaped to Chang'an, he lied about it since he actually wants Hong Yide to attack. Because if Hong Yide gets exposed, then Lu Yunji would be screwed (since he was supposed to have killed him).

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Lu Qi walked into the study room and saw Fu Yin drawing. When he saw her, he felt happy for no reason.

“Yin’er, what are you drawing?” He smiled and walked forward.

“Didn’t you ask me to get along well with Sister Ling Long? I don’t know how to do other things but I can draw. I want to draw a picture for Sister Ling Long. Maybe this will make her happy.” Fu Yin placed down the brush and held up the picture. She smiled and said, “Look, does it look like her?”

“That’s a good idea--” Lu Qi suddenly fell silent as his gaze became icy. Fu Yin pretended not to see the change in Lu Qi. ““How is it? Does it not look like her?”

Lu Qi did not answer her question directly. “Yin’er, Ling Long is wearing--”

“A pearl dress. Sister Ling Long looked extremely beautiful when she wore the pearl dress. It is hard to forget the sight of her in the dress. Hence, I drew her most beautiful image.”

Lu Qi pressed, “When did you see Ling Long wear this?”

“A few days ago. At that time, I was thinking that Young Master was so nice to Sister Ling Long and gave her such a pretty dress...”

Lu Qi did not listen to her finish and stormed out.

“Where are you going?” Fu Yin rushed out and called out after him. She was not in a rush nor was she startled. She slowly rolled up the picture and threw it into a basket before walking out. Ling Long had hurt her time and again. It was time for her to get back at her.

Soon, Ling Long was dragged to the back garden. At the same time, Housekeeper Wu handed a small box over to Lu Qi. It was filled with pearls. Lu Qi snorted and Ling Long immediately fell to a kneel.

“I have always loved pearls. I saved for many years to buy these.” In a panic, her lies became ridiculous.

Lu Qi did not bother beating around the bush. “How did Yingying’s pearl dress fall into your hands?”

Ling Long was startled. “I didn’t...it’s not! It’s not!”

“I have a witness who saw you wearing the dress.” Lu Qi glances at Fu Yin. Fu Yin lowered her eyes.

Ling Long immediately knew that this was Fu Yin’s revenge. She gritted her teeth, “It was you? You bitch, you just want to harm me! I knew it. I knew it since the day you entered. You are an evil witch!” She cursed hysterically as she threw herself at Fu Yin. However, she was held back by a guard.

Fu Yin took a step back and Lu Qi lightly took her hand. “Don’t worry. I am here.” He then turned to Ling Long. “Tell me. How did the pearl dress fall into your hands?”

Ling Long shouted, “I have been wrongly accused! That vixen is trying to harm me! I have always done my best in serving you. Young Master, why do you not believe me?”

Lu Qi scoffed. He ordered the guards to punish Ling Long. The sound of stick hitting flesh could be heard along with Ling Long’s miserable cries. Initially, Fu Yin looked on happily. However, when Ling Long seemed to be struggling to catch her breath, she could not bear to watch on any longer. She even hesitated as to whether to help Ling Long plead for mercy.

Coincidentally, Lu Hanxing walked over. Seeing Ling Long get beaten, he could not help but speak up for her. "How much trouble can a dumb servant make? Lu Qi, you shouldn't get too angry. Just beat her for show."

Lu Qi spoke icily, "She dares to steal Yingying's pearl dress. It won't be a pity if I beat her to death."

Lu Hanxing's face twitched. "Oh? She is so daring. No wonder you are so angry." He felt guilty and wanted to escape. "I recalled that I have other things to do. I shall head out and will take my leave first."

Ling Long was in disbelief. "Lu Hanxing, you are not helping me after seeing me get beaten. I will not help you hide it any longer." She turned to Lu Qi. "Lu Hanxing is the one who gave me the pearl dress!"

Lu Qi's gaze crossed between Ling Long and Lu Hanxing. All of a sudden, he realised that there was something going on between the two of them and his expression darkened.

Lu Hanxing blew up in frustration. "You bitch, don't randomly accuse others! Since when did I give you the pearl dress? You are the one that stole it and you are trying to blame it on me?"

Ling Long let it all out. "When Old Master and Young Master were imprisoned, you were the one that told me that you took all the valuables in the residence to bribe officials to save their lives. However, you took half of the valuables for yourself. You kept the pearl dress. You lusted over me and gave it to me in the end."

"Shut up! Absolute nonsense! I will beat you till death!"

Ling Long did not care. She had to protect herself. "It is you! You're the one who stole the pearl dress!"

"All of you better shut up!" Lu Qi coldly instructed Housekeeper Wu, "Punish all those that stole according to the house rules." He was not going to let others laugh at him for getting taken advantage of.

Ling Long was horrified. "Please have mercy on me. I am innocent! I did not steal it, it was Lu Hanxing--"

Housekeeper Wu dragged Ling Long away.

Fu Yin had not been at the residence for long and did not know how they were going to punish Ling Long. She thought that the most they would do would be to throw her out of the residence.

Lu Hanxing did not even glance at Ling Long. Instead, he smiled crookedly. "Lu Qi, you are smart. You figured that that slut was trying to frame me..."

Lu Qi grabbed onto Lu Hanxing's collar and dragged him to the study room.

Fu Yin heard punching and kicking sounds. She also heard Lu Hanxing's cries of pain and knew that Lu Qi was teaching him a lesson. But deep down, she was slightly worried about Ling Long. She rushed down the steps and ran in the direction that Housekeeper Wu left. For a moment, she could not find them. She then caught sight of Housekeeper Wu walking out of their small courtyard, along with others.

Fu Yin waited for them to go afar before heading into the courtyard. She pushed open Ling Long's door. She was intimidated by the sight she saw. A rope was hanging from the beam and Ling Long was dangling in midair. A moment ago, she was alive and kicking, now she had turned into a ghost.

Fu Yin stumbled out of the courtyard. She never thought that just because of her selfish motives of not wanting to get bullied anymore, she would cause someone else's death.

As she ran, she saw a black figure. She immediately held onto the wall to stop herself. She saw Lu Hanxing walking away with a limp. Although his nose was bruised and his face was swollen, he was still alive!

Fu Yin furiously dashed into the study room and shouted at Lu Qi. "Why?!"

Lu Qi was bewildered. "What?"

Fu Yin stared straight at Lu Qi. "Ling Long is dead. Why is Lu

Hanxing still alive? Lu Hanxing was the one that stole the pearl dress. Although Ling Long was in the wrong, her fault lay in accepting stolen goods. Was it necessary to kill her while the thief remains alive?"

Lu Qi's expression turned solemn. "Are you questioning me?"

"Yes, I am questioning you." Her body trembled as she thought of how Lu Hanxing had caused her mother's death. "Why did you let Lu Hanxing live? He has done so many evil things. Do you think just beating him up for show is good enough? Why didn't you kill him!"

Lu Qi slapped Fu Yin. "If you want to know why, let me tell you. Ling Long is just a servant. Although Lu Hanxing is useless and always causes trouble, he has the surname Lu and is still a member of our Lu family. And--" He lowered his head and coldly whispered Fu Yin's ear, "Don't forget. You are just a servant. Now get lost!"

Fu Yin furiously glared at Lu Qi before running out.

Lu Qi clenched his right fist and punched the study table. He was feeling frustrated. *How dare she glare at him? Did she think that he would coax her just because she acted pitiful? Ridiculous!*

Court Lady

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Fu Yin sat on the steps and sobbed. She shivered as the cold wind blew, bending her body over and forming a ball. All of a sudden, a breeze brushed past her ear as something warm fell on her shoulders. Lu Qi had brought a coat for her and sat down beside her. She stood and made a move to leave.

Lu Qi spoke in a commanding tone, “Stop right there! Didn’t Housekeeper Wu teach you the rules?”

Fu Yin shivered as soon as she heard the word rules.

Lu Qi pulled her back down and held onto her wrist. “Where is your bracelet?” He remembered that Ling Long had once eyed that bracelet of hers. It was something Fu Yin's deceased mother had left behind.

“It broke.” *Like her, it was broken.*

Lu Qi reached out and lightly brushed her face, wiping away her tears. However, she shrunk backward and turned her head.

Lu Qi spoke warmly, “Are you annoyed at me?”

“I wouldn’t dare.” The lives of servants in the Duke Chen Residence were as thin as paper. “I cannot compare to people who are born lucky and have a good surname. No matter how many evil things

they do, they can still live.”

Lu Qi looked at her. He found it strange. “Why do you hate Lu Hanxing so much?”

Fu Yin could not tell him the truth. “I just find it unfair.”

Lu Qi fell silent for a while before suddenly saying, “Yin’er, your mother is not around anymore. I don’t have a mother anymore either. At that time, Great Tang had yet to be established. Father was always out fighting battles. There was a disaster that befell our house. My mother was pregnant with Yingying at that time and could only bring me to find my aunt.”

In Fu Yin’s eyes, Lu Qi had always seemed superior and proud like a peacock. She had never seen him in distress.

“On the way, my mother went through a difficult pregnancy and finally gave birth to Yingying. However...” Lu Qi’s eyes glistened. “Do you think I treat Yingying well?”

Fu Yin nodded. She actually found it strange when she saw how caring he was towards his sister.

“But at that time, I hated her for causing our mother’s death. I once left her on the streets for wild dogs to eat. However, she cried so loudly she scared the wild dogs away. I had no choice but to carry her once again. But she kept on crying and I did not know what to do. I used my hand to cover her mouth. I never thought that she would suck on one of my fingers and stop crying. She even smiled at me.” A hint of smile flitted across Lu Qi’s face. “I was still young at that time and walked slowly. I don’t know how long it took me to walk 15 kilometers. When I finally reached my aunt’s house, Yingying no longer cried nor smiled. I was scared. I was scared that she would end up like my mother; to sleep and never wake up. It was my aunt that rescued Yingying. She also saved me. My aunt helped us through those challenging days until my father finally found us.”

Fu Yin was moved. “Your aunt is a good person.”

“She is a widow. Lu Hanxing is her only son.” Lu Qi looked at Fu Yin.

“Now do you understand? No matter how much of a bastard Lu Hanxing is, I can scold him, bully him and use him. But I cannot take his life.”

His gaze softened as he lightly held Fu Yin’s face. “Does it still hurt?”

Fu Yin bit down on her lip. “It is much better.”

Lu Qi draped the outer coat over Fu Yin once more. This time, Fu Yin did not struggle. In her heart, a small voice called out to her. *He knew how to be grateful and protect his sister. Maybe this person was not incorrigible.*

On Princess Xinnan’s birthday, she received two big presents. One made her laugh, the other made her cry.

Sheng Chuling was slightly awkward as he gave her another peace knot. This second peace knot was a lot better looking than the previous. She was extremely delighted.

She thought that the day started off well and was excited to receive all her presents. Unexpectedly, when she saw her Imperial Father, she received a lot of presents. Amongst the presents, Lu Yunji managed to mix his in. It was the Lu family’s family heirloom, a jade pendant.

No matter how insensible she was, she knew she could not accept something like this. However, when she moved to reject it, her Imperial Father said that Sheng Chumu did not have good fortune but Lu Qi was also talented in both the martial arts and literal arts. He wanted her to marry Lu Qi. She was so shocked that she nearly dropped their family’s jade pendant. Xinnan immediately expressed that she was unwilling. Eventually, she angered her Imperial Father and was even escorted back to her palace by guards and ordered to be watched.

“Is he afraid that I will grow wings and fly out of the palace? He is actually asking people to monitor me!” Xinnan fumed and paced in circles.

“How did your birthday end up like this? Princess, it is not that I

want to lecture you but you are too rash. Of all people, you decide to contradict His Majesty. It is no wonder that His Majesty is furious and called guards to lock you up.” Zhenzhu was honest.

“Shut up! I am already annoyed. Can you not annoy me further? Do you think I want to go against Imperial Father? I had to contradict him before he marries me off to Lu Qi. I can’t possibly smile and nod right? Even if I die, I won’t marry Lu Qi.” In the past, she thought that she could do anything as she was the princess. Now, she felt like she could not do anything because she was the princess. She could not even choose the person she wanted to marry.

“Peh peh peh, it is your birthday today. How can you talk about death?” Zhenzhu was extremely loyal. “Princess, what should we do now?”

“We just settled a Sheng Chumu and now we have to settle Lu Qi--” She suddenly paused. “Speaking of this, how did I settle Sheng Chumu?”

Zhenzhu replied, “You did not do anything. Sheng Chumu’s side settled it.”

“Oh right.” Her eyes suddenly lit up. “I remember a story that Sheng Chuling once told me. Zhangsan borrowed Lisi’s money and had to return it the next day. However, Zhangsan did not have any money. At night, Zhangsan could not fall asleep and he tossed and turned in bed. Zhangsan’s wife could not stand it and asked him what was going on. Zhangsan replied that he could not fall asleep because he could not pay back the money owed. When Zhangsan’s wife heard this, she got out of bed and opened the window. She shouted towards Lisi’s house - Lisi, Zhangsan does not have money to repay you tomorrow. Thereafter, Zhangshan’s wife told Zhangsan to sleep peacefully. Now it was Lisi’s turn to suffer from insomnia.”

Zhenzhu was puzzled. “What is the point of this story?”

“You are really beyond help. Only someone as clever as me can understand the deeper meaning behind this story. Whenever Sheng Chuling has a problem, he always pushes it to his elder brother.” She smiled proudly. “Therefore, whenever I have a problem, I can do the

same and push it to my elder sister-in-law.”

Zhenzhu was in a daze. Xinnan yawned and lay on the couch.
“Finally, I don’t have any more worries.”

While the birthday girl went to bed, Concubine Yan had to pacify the furious Emperor.

“Your Majesty, even if you are angry, you don’t have to lock Xinnan up. You should just scold her.”

“I want to correct her attitude. It is not that I am petty and want to punish her just because she contradicted me. I am worried that her temper will become an issue when she gets married. She won’t have as carefree days as she has in the Palace. She needs to love her husband, teach her children and be filial to her parents-in-law. How can I not do something about her spoiled attitude? I have really spoilt her!” The Emperor was fuming.

“It is not an urgent matter to correct her attitude. After all, it is her birthday today.” Concubine Yan gently consoled.

“I have already locked her up. Let’s drop the matter.” The Emperor suddenly halted. “Speaking of birthdays, Ge’er’s (Prince Zhou Lige) birthday is coming up soon right?”

Concubine Yan smiled, “It is not coming soon, it has already passed.”

The Emperor froze. “Has it already passed? Why didn’t I know about this?”

Concubine Yan did not think it was a big deal. “Your Majesty has been busy. Her Majesty empathize with you and did not instruct the internal attendants to report to you. It is pardonable.”

The Emperor shook his head. “The Empress cannot be blamed for this. Recently, she has always been ill. However, the group of internal attendants have become more and more bold, they even dare to make their own decisions now. And you, even if they did not report it, why didn’t you remind me?”

“Your Majesty was troubling over Lu Yunji’s act of ransacking the

citizens. Ge'er said that he did not want to add any more troubles to you." Concubine Yan remained gentle.

The Emperor sighed, "You have taught this child to be too considerate. It makes me frustrated yet my heart aches for him at the same time."

"There are so many princes and princesses in the palace. Your Majesty has so many things to handle daily, how can you care about every single one of them? Ge'er has received Your Majesty's benevolence to stay in the palace temporarily to accompany me. We are very grateful."

"Concubine Yan, you have attended to me for so many years and have always been attentive and cautious. I know that you have received quite a number of grievances because of your birth origin. You even suffered as you brought Ge'er up."

"I am the daughter of Emperor Yang of Sui. Although Great Sui has already fallen, I am still able to enjoy the luxuries in the palace. This is all because Your Majesty loves and protects me. Ge'er does not care about suffering a little, he knows that Your Majesty loves him."

"The more understanding he is, the more I feel like I owe him as a father. Although his birthday has passed, I want to make it up to him."

"Does Your Majesty truly want to make it up to Ge'er?" Concubine Yan raised her brows.

"I cannot be biased." The Emperor's words held enormous weight.

"Since Your Majesty has the intentions, forgive me for being bold and asking on his behalf." Since her son was not going to ask for it, then she shall do it as his mother. After all, this concerned his lifetime happiness.

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The next day, Xinnan was in great spirits as she went to see her Imperial Father.

The Emperor asked if she had reflected. She expressed clearly that there was a reason why she could not marry Lu Qi. The Emperor was unhappy, "Tell me your reason."

"The reason is--" Xinnan breathed in deeply, "Fu Siyan!"

The Emperor froze for a while before summoning Fu Rou.

"Fu Siyan, Princess Xinnan has a reason for not being able to marry Lu Qi but she is not willing to tell me the reason. She said that you would be able to help me understand the situation."

Fu Rou was completely oblivious and looked towards Princess Xinnan. However, no matter how she looked, she could not catch Princess Xinnan's eyes.

The Emperor pressed on, "Since Xinnan is not willing to say it, then you shall say it on her behalf. Why can't Xinnan marry Lu Qi?"

"Your Majesty, I..." Fu Rou could not carry on. No matter how clever she was, she could not work without the right equipment. *She didn't even know what was going on, how was she to make up a story?* "Your Majesty, may I speak to the Princess in private?"

Although the Emperor found it strange as to why the two of them needed to speak, he agreed.

As soon as they walked out of the palace hall, Fu Rou asked her what was going on.

Xinnan chuckled, “Simply put, Imperial Father wants me to marry Lu Qi but I am not willing. However, I don’t know how to convince my Imperial Father. Therefore, I called on you to help me think. Fu Siyan, you are Sheng Chuling’s future sister-in-law. As a sister-in-law, you should take on some responsibilities right? Sheng Chuling is responsible for me and you are responsible for Sheng Chuling. Hence, I am your responsibility.”

Fu Rou was speechless. Xinnan pleaded, “Fu Siyan, please help me.”

“Since you already put it this way, I have to help you even if I don’t want to. But how can I think of anything with so little time?”

As they spoke, a peacock strutted towards them. Sunlight shined on its jade green tail feathers. Fu Rou’s eyes lit up. She thought of an idea!

Fu Rou walked back into Ganlou Palace alone.

“So?” The Emperor did not bother asking why Xinnan did not enter along with Fu Rou and waited for Fu Rou to tell him the reason.

Fu Rou remained composed. “Your Majesty, the reason why Princess Xinnan is not willing to marry Lu Qi is related to someone else.”

“Oh? Who? Who is so bold as to influence the Princess’ marriage? Tell me, I want to see how many heads he has.” The Emperor pulled on his sleeve.

Fu Rou replied, “This person is Grand Empress Taimu.”

The Emperor froze. “My Imperial Mother?”

“That’s right. Grand Empress Taimu is brilliant and kind beyond belief. When she passed away, the Princess was still young. However, in the Princess’ heart, she has always longed, revered and even have

a deep admiration for the Grand Empress. Grand Empress Taimu had a legendary and blissful marriage. The Princess has made a vow to the spirit of Grand Empress Taimu. She promised to be like her Imperial Grandmother and find a consort that is both good at martial and literal arts.”

The Emperor did not understand. “Lu Qi is someone that I have chosen as her consort. He is talented in both martial arts and literature. Which part of him is not up to standards? Since Princess Xinnan wants a well-rounded person, all the more she should agree to the marriage happily.”

“Your Majesty, the Princess is not willing to marry Lu Qi because he has yet to pass the most important test.” Fu Rou was neither subservient nor overbearing.

“What test?” The Emperor found it weird.

“The Peacock Screen Selection.”

“That’s right! The Peacock Screen Selection!” Xinnan supported the Grand Emperor as he entered.

The Grand Emperor smiled, “If he wants to marry a wife, he has to go through the Peacock Screen Selection. If not, he cannot be chosen!”

Xinnan gave Fu Rou a suggestive look. Luckily Fu Rou had thought of asking her to invite this saving grace.

The Emperor immediately walked down and greeted respectfully, “Grand Emperor.”

The Grand Emperor accepted his greeting. “I remember when numerous men came for your mother. There were so many of them the doorstep broke from being stepped on too many times. Your grandfather cherished your mother dearly and would never dare to easily agree to a marriage. He then made a Peacock Screen. Those who wanted to marry your mother were given two arrows to shoot at the peacock’s eyes. Many tried but none managed to pass. At that time, I was just a small guard. I received the news late and when I got there, there were quite a number that tried already.”

Xinnan held onto the Emperor's arm. "What's the point of being first? What matters is ability. When Imperial Grandfather came, he took the bow and simultaneously shot both the peacock's eyes."

"That's right! My two arrows shot both the peacock's eyes." The Grand Emperor reminisced about the old days and his voice was light. "My father-in-law appreciated me and immediately betrothed your Imperial Grandmother to me. Xinnan, I never thought that you would be the only grandchild of mine to miss your Imperial Grandmother."

Xinnan spoke carefully, "Imperial Grandfather, don't say that. I am not the only one that misses Imperial Grandmother. Imperial Father misses Imperial Grandmother as well." She turned to look at the Emperor. "Right, Imperial Father?"

The Emperor was emotional as he recalled the past. "Of course I miss Imperial Mother."

Xinnan suddenly kneeled. "Imperial Father, on account of Imperial Grandmother, please help me set up the Peacock Screen for my marriage. I really want to be like Imperial Grandmother and entrust my life with someone worthy."

"Xinnan, you are very filial to your Imperial Grandmother. If you had this intention, why didn't you tell me directly?" *Why did she need Fu Siyan to twist and turn and go an entire round.*

"I...marriage is a big matter. I was shy to speak about it to you directly. That's why I could only ask Fu Siyan to help me. Imperial Father, does that mean you agree?"

The Emperor smiled and nodded. Simply put, the Peacock Screen Selection was just a matter of archery. He was ninety percent confident of Lu Qi's ability.

However, the Emperor forgot about Fu Rou. Fu Rou was excellent in embroidery. The Peacock Screen was embroidered. But when it came to embroidery, Fu Rou had a thousand ideas to make even the best shooter confused.

Fu Rou was working with Shu'er. They lowered blinds all over the windows to prevent the sunlight from shining in. Thereafter, they made different coloured dyes to dye strings. In front of her was a peacock screen that had just been delivered to her from the Embroidery Department. She was the one that embroidered the screen and left it in the storage room. She did not think that there would actually be use for it.

Shu'er brought over some herbal medicine. "Do we have to put in herbal medicine for this dye?"

Fu Rou did not say more as she took the herbal medicine and ground it. She carefully measured it before pouring it into the water. She did not allow for any mistakes. After the threads were dyed, they were dried before they could be attached to a needle and used to embroider the screen.

Shu'er did not understand. "This screen is already very pretty, why do you need to embroider further?"

Fu Rou said, "Because she called me Elder Sister-in-law."

Shu'er made an *ah* sound. Fu Rou immediately corrected herself. "Because I think that there are too few feathers on the peacock's head."

The next day, Fu Yin was helping Lu Qi put on his clothes.

Meanwhile, Lu Qi grumbled, "I don't know what the Emperor is thinking. If he wanted to bestow marriage then he should just do it. Why must they set up the Peacock Screen Selection? It is all because of Fu Rou creating trouble."

As Fu Yin heard Fu Rou's name, her actions slowed.

Lu Qi immediately noticed and was happy. "Why? Are you jealous that I am marrying the Princess? Don't worry. I won't let the Princess bully you when she enters our residence."

“With Young Master’s affection, I don’t have anything to worry about.” Fu Yin did not care about Lu Qi’s marriage with the Princess. “How did this Fu Rou girl offend you?”

Lu Qi sneered, “She is precious to Sheng Chumu. I don’t get along with Sheng Chumu and will sort out whoever Sheng Chumu likes.”

Fu Yin was stunned. “You want to sort her out?”

“Don’t mention her and ruin my mood.” Lu Qi suddenly embraced Fu Yin intimately. Fu Yin wanted to push him away. “It is early in the morning...” All of a sudden, a pair of jade bracelets appeared in front of her.

Lu Qi helped Fu Yin wear the jade bracelets. “Didn’t the bracelets given to you by your mother break? I specially bought this pair for you. Although it cannot replace what your mother left behind, whenever you look at it, you will know that there is someone in this world that cares for you.” Warmth filled his eyes as he smiled gently. “Although I cannot choose my own wife, I can choose who to dote on.”

Fu Yin stared blankly at the beautiful bracelets. When she pulled herself back to reality, Lu Qi had already left. She could not help but place her hand on her heart. The bracelets gave off a clear ringing sound when they hit each other. It was as if they fell into her heart and created a ripple. *She actually thought that he was gentle! What should she do?*

Uh oh. I think Fu Yin is falling for Lu Qi!! What do you think will happen?

Lu Qi may be a terrible person, but he treats Fu Yin and Yingying very well!!

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A banner was raised in the wide courtyard of the Royal Palace. The last time that the place had been so lively was when the Imperial Competition was held. This time, even the Grand Emperor came to watch.

Lu Qi stepped up to greet them. The Emperor had high expectations for him. After all, this was the second time Xinnan's marriage was brought up.

“Lu Qi, today's Peacock Screen Selection was suggested by Princess Xinnan out of remembrance of her late Imperial Grandmother. It is also a way for me and the Grand Emperor to commemorate Grand Empress Taimu. I hope that you will not disappoint me.”

Lu Qi was respectful yet confident. “I will not let you down, Your Majesty.”

The internal attendants reported that Sheng Xiaojing and Sheng Chuling were seeking an audience.

Xinnan was sitting on the same platform as the Emperor. When she saw Sheng Chuling enter with a bow in his hand and arrows on his back, she could not help but smile.

The Emperor frowned, “Duke Lu, why are you here to join?”

"I heard that Your Majesty had set up the Peacock Screen to help Princess Xinnan select a consort. Although my son Chuling is untalented, his archery skills are still passable..."

The Emperor cut Sheng Xiaojing off. "So you thought that he could also try and shoot two shots."

Sheng Xiaojing braced himself. "Your Majesty has always been fair. The Peacock Screen Selection is based on true abilities..."

"Do you think that my daughter is like a cabbage in the market? You can take one if you have the ability?" The Emperor shook his head. "Sheng Chumu has disappointed me before. Are you trying to disappoint me again? My daughter is a peerless beauty. First of all, Sheng Chuling will not inherit the position of Duke. Secondly, he has not achieved any merits from war. What is he going to use to compete with Lu Qi? Even if he can shoot the Peacock Screen accurately, he is not qualified to marry Xinnan."

Sheng Chuling summoned his courage. "Your Majesty..."

Sheng Xiaojing tugged on his sleeve, indicating for him to keep quiet and back off to the wooden shed by the side.

Meanwhile, Chief Cao ordered people to set up the Peacock Screen a hundred and fifty steps away from the start line.

Yang Bo muttered, "Why is the Peacock Screen so far away? Wouldn't it be easier if the shooter could stand closer?"

Chief Cao laughed, "You brat, you received so many benefits from Duke Chen. Are you trying to help Young General Lu?"

Yang Bo immediately waved his hands expressing that he would not dare.

Chief Cao smiled with a hidden implication. "Don't worry. Even without you saying, I know to help them too." Even if they did not know how to read others, they would at least know how to read the Emperor. From his expression, it was clear that the Emperor favoured Lu Qi. How could they remain by the book?

The internal attendants signalled to Chief Cao that they were done setting the screen.

Chief Cao reported to the Emperor. "Your Majesty, the Peacock Screen has been set a hundred and fifty steps away."

The Emperor bestowed the arrows, asking Lu Qi to prepare.

"Wait!" Xinnan remembered Sheng Chuling mentioning that Lu Qi's archery skills were extraordinary. "A hundred and fifty steps is too close, it has to be at least two hundred steps."

Lu Qi halted. *Two hundred steps? Even the best bow can only shoot about three hundred steps. Moreover, he was using a bow for hunting.*

The Emperor asked Chief Cao, "You are the oldest person in the palace. Does the palace have any rules for how far the Peacock Screen must be?"

"The palace does not have any rules set for this. Your Majesty, do you want to change it to a hundred steps? We can have a good omen of a hundred percent success." Chief Cao was trying to please the Emperor.

"What?" Xinnan frowned. "You just said that there weren't any rules. How dare you suggest more?"

Yang Bo suddenly added, "Your Majesty, it is not certain how far the screen should be placed. However, the ancient books do state how to differentiate whether it is good to shoot."

The Emperor signalled for him to continue speaking.

"In the mention of archery in the ancient books, it was written that in the Chu nation, to differentiate whether an archer is good, he would shoot at a willow tree a hundred steps away. If he shoots a hundred arrows and all is on target, he is considered good. Therefore, according to customs, it should be a hundred steps to differentiate whether one's archery skills are good."

Xinnan fumed, "You are just a lowly attendant. How dare you speak in front of my Imperial Father!"

The Emperor ignored her as he turned to the Grand Emperor. “Grand Emperor, what do...”

The Grand Emperor muttered, “Mmhm, I am looking forward to the continuation of the Peacock Screen Selection. Since Lu Qi is the only participant today, wouldn’t it ruin the mood if he misses because it is placed too far?”

The Emperor carried on, “Okay, then let’s set it to a hundred steps.”

Xinnan opened her mouth to speak. The Emperor threw her a look and she had no choice but to keep silent.

Lu Qi took fifty steps towards the Peacock Screen and proudly pulled his bow. He was full of confidence as he was about to shoot. However, he suddenly saw the peacock on the screen move. He was startled as his arm drooped. He thought that he had seen wrongly and blinked several times. Thereafter, he pulled his bow once more. However, the peacock did not stop moving and there was no way for him to aim properly.

The audience noticed that there was something wrong with Lu Qi.

Sheng Xiaojing narrowed his eyes. “He has been standing there in that posture for a while. Why isn’t he shooting?”

Seeing how the Emperor was frowning, Lu Yunji immediately spoke up for his son, “When an expert is in action, it is natural to be careful. What are you anxious for!”

Xinnan did not care as she shouted loudly to rush him. “Are you going to shoot or not? If you wait so long, then you might as well not shoot!”

Lu Qi had no choice but to force himself to shoot. When the internal attendants brought the Peacock Screen over, both his arrows had missed the peacock’s eyes. The Emperor was disappointed. The higher his expectations, the greater the disappointment.

Lu Qi knelt. “Your Majesty, please forgive me. When I was shooting, I noticed the peacock...”

Xinnan cut in, “You realized that the peacock’s eyes were too small and that is why you couldn’t shoot it. Imperial Father, you said that he was excellent in both martial and literal arts. Luckily, Imperial Grandmother has blessed me. If not, I would have married the wrong person.”

Lu Qi wanted to argue, “Princess, it is not like that...”

The Emperor cut him off. “Don’t say anymore. I don’t know if you have been enjoying yourself and archery skills are out of practice or if it was a moment of anxiousness and you made a mistake. If you missed, you miss. The more you try to argue, the more it seems like you are incapable.”

The Grand Emperor stood up and sighed, “Sigh, I guess the story of the Peacock Screen Selection will not continue. Head back to my palace. I am disappointed.”

Xinnan was delighted. When she left, she secretly exchanged looks with Sheng Chuling. They were both rest assured.

Very soon, the Peacock Screen was taken down and everyone left.

Sheng Xiaojing walked beside Lu Qi. “Young General Lu, you should not be too disappointed. Your archery skills are not bad, it is just that you mistook the feathers on the peacock’s head for its eyes.”

Lu Yunji was furious. “Duke Lu, you don’t have to take a jibe at us. Even though Lu Qi did not get to marry Princess Xinnan, at least His Majesty acknowledged him and gave him a chance. Unlike your son, whom His Majesty did not even consider.”

Sheng Xiaojing could not stand being outdone. “Chuling only lacks military merit. He is still young. In the future, he will naturally have the chance to serve Great Tang. We will see.” *He had three sons whereas this old monkey had only one son. Tsk. Just based on numbers, he had already won!*

Fu Rou looked at the height of the sun, it was already midday. The Peacock Screen Selection must have ended. As expected, Yang Bo

dashed in happily.

“Fu Siyan, both of Lu Qi’s arrows were slanted. The marriage between him and Princess Xinnan is no longer happening.”

Fu Rou breathed a sigh of relief. “Yang Bo, this is all thanks to you.”

“This is nothing. I merely repeated what you told me from the ancient books to His Majesty. After I said it, His Majesty even looked at me with slight appreciation. In the future, if His Majesty gives me an important position, I will have to thank you.” Yang Bo looked curiously. “Fu Siyan, since you don’t want Lu Qi to marry Princess Xinnan, why did you ask me to suggest to His Majesty to let Lu Qi stand closer to the screen? If he stands closer, won’t it be easier for him to shoot?”

Fu Rou smiled mysteriously, “Although he stood near to the screen, ultimately he still missed right?” She suddenly looked behind Yang Bo. “Oh right, didn’t I ask you to help me bring back the Peacock Screen Embroidery?”

Yang Bo grimaced. “I asked a few other attendants. They all said that they saw the Peacock Screen Embroidery being torn down and thrown into a broken basket. However, when I looked through the broken basket, I could not find it.”

Fu Rou’s expression changed. “You couldn’t find it? Did you try again? Could it have fallen into some corner?”

“Fu Siyan, would I dare not put in effort into something that I promised you? Not just the huge piece of Peacock Screen Embroidery, I could not even find a cloth as big as my palm. I was worried that I missed out and looked through it three times. Smell me. My entire body stinks of garbage. I guess that someone might have taken it away?” Yang Bo lifted his sleeve.

Fu Rou’s heart sank. If someone with ill-intentions had taken it away, things would be horrible.

The peacock was brilliant and colourful except for two holes near the eyes ruining the entire embroidery. Fu Rou could not find the

embroidery no matter how hard she tried because it had already fallen into the hands of the Lu father and son pair.

“You saw this peacock move?” Lu Yunji walked around the study table. The embroidery did indeed look extremely life-like but it was still just an embroidery.

“Father, I am speaking the truth.” This time Lu Qi could not see any significant difference. “The palace said that this Peacock Screen was personally made by Fu Rou. With her abilities, it will not be difficult for her to plant some tricks on this screen.”

“If she really dared to do something, this will be the evidence that can be used against her. She has always had a good relationship with Consort Han and an ambiguous relationship with Sheng Chumu. Once we can prove that she deceived the Emperor, everything will go our way. We can implicate the Duke Lu Residence.” Lu Yunji believed that this was an opportunity.

“I will ask someone to send this to the most experienced seamstress in Chang’an.” Lu Qi understood.

“No, this is too important, we cannot lose it. Ask them to come over to examine it.” Lu Yunji was experienced. “They have to check this thoroughly. Don’t let even a strand go unchecked.”

Lu Qi acknowledged and followed Lu Yunji out of the study room.

Fu Yin had been eavesdropping and she entered the room. She saw the embroidery on the table and was alarmed after hearing their conversation. If they found a clue from the embroidery, Fu Rou would be in trouble and would even implicate Brother Sheng Chumu’s family. She picked up the peacock embroidery as her other hand reached for the scissors in the drawer.

“Yin’er.” Lu Qi entered. “What are you doing?”

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Fu Yin froze. “I was looking at this beautiful embroidery and saw how there are two holes in it. What a pity.”

“Don’t look down on the two holes, this embroidery is a gem.” Lu Qi was not suspicious of her as he moved beside Fu Yin. He took the embroidery away. “It might help me cause the demise of someone who hates me.”

“What are you talking about? I don’t understand.” Fu Yin wanted to use an indirect approach.

Lu Qi, however, smiled. “You are too innocent. It is better if you do not understand.” He turned around to hug Fu Yin. “Come, your Young Master suffered in the Royal Palace today, how do you intend on comforting me?”

“How about you return to your room first? When I am done cleaning up, I will sing for you?” Fu Yin wanted to send him away.

However, Lu Qi called for Housekeeper Wu. In front of Fu Yin, he handed the embroidery over to him. “Keep this in the storage room, I will not allow for any mistakes. Next, invite the best seamstress in this city to our residence.”

Housekeeper Wu took the embroidery away. With this, Fu Yin could not do anything.

Lu Qi looked at Fu Yin seriously. "So strange. I did not pass the Peacock Screen Selection today and did not manage to marry Princess Xinnan. Yet, I do not feel disappointed. On the contrary, I am slightly happy." He stepped closer and held Fu Yin in his arms. "Yin'er, for as long as I do not marry a wife. You and I can spend our days carefree like this."

Fu Yin's gaze was slightly perplexed. "Young Master..."

Lu Qi tilted his head and kissed Fu Yin. Initially, her eyes widened. However, she slowly closed them and felt a tenderness from him. His strength was surprisingly comforting.

Evening. Huayin Palace.

Li Baolin invited Fu Rou to play chess. However, Fu Rou kept on making mistakes.

"I thought that you would always only have one expression." Li Baolin half laughed as she glanced at Fu Rou.

Fu Rou had a lot of things on her mind. "What expression?"

"Calm and prepared as if nothing could knock you down." Li Baolin's tone changed as she blinked. "However, you made a lot of mistakes today. Your confused side makes me like you better."

Fu Rou sighed, "I shall not hide from you. I do have some troubles."

"Let me guess." Li Baolin was the one that had a card up her sleeve. "This trouble of yours has something to do with Young General Lu not being able to shoot the Peacock Screen accurately?"

Fu Rou's eyes widened slightly.

Li Baolin smiled, "I don't know about other things but I have personally seen your embroidery skills. I heard that Young General Lu was grumbling after this morning and mentioned something about the peacock on the screen moving. I was once the head seamstress in the Seamstress Department and would naturally know that it is

impossible for the peacock embroidery to become alive and move. However, you were the one who taught me how to incorporate silk into my skirt and use the sunlight to make my skirt glimmer. Maybe you had a way to create a miracle. If you believe in me, you can tell me. How did you do it?"

"It is not that I do not trust you, but I don't want to implicate anyone innocent." Fu Rou was meticulous and knew the seriousness of the situation.

Li Baolin held Fu Rou's hand. "Ever since you helped me, I have treated you as my sister. In this palace, no one can walk alone."

Fu Rou fell silent for a moment. "The secret to the Peacock Screen is the many layers of stitch that I added beside the peacock's feathers. What if I told you that the colour of every layer could fade according to the way the sun shone and exposed the colour of the layer beneath it?"

Li Baolin was astonished. "Threads that can fade in colour?"

"My family has run a dye workshop for generations. Not only have we perfected the skill of dyeing, we also found the secret to fading colours. There is a herbal medicine called Cat Tongue Flower. Normally, it is nothing amazing. However, by using the correct amount of it when dyeing, it allows cloth that has been dyed to fade when sunlight shines on it. When I handed the screen over to the Seamstress Department, I specifically told Attendant Yuan to only remove the red cloth covering the screen at the very last moment. It is to prevent the colours of the threads from fading prior to the event. When the red cloth was removed and Lu Qi aimed at the screen, the sunlight shining on it would have caused the colours of the threads to fade, gradually exposing the marvel of the embroidery. In this manner, it would cause him to think that the peacock is moving."

"From a distance, no one would be able to tell such a small change is occurring." Li Baolin was also experienced in the field.

"That is why I asked Yang Bo to convince His Majesty to allow Lu Qi to stand closer to the screen." Everything had been planned.

“So that is what happened. But even if the top layer fades, it would turn white and hide the layer underneath it, how can it show the embroidery beneath it?” Li Baolin asked.

Fu Rou lowered her voice. “Baolin, when you were trying to win over His Majesty, do you remember how you made something unimpressive emit radiance?”

Li Baolin came to a realisation. “Silk.”

Fu Rou nodded. “That’s right, silk is transparent and has no colour.”

“Not only is silk transparent and colourless, it will also reflect light. When Lu Qi saw the change in the embroidery, he would have already been surprised. When the reflection of the sunlight shines into his eyes, it would naturally make it harder for him to aim.” Li Baolin was in awe. “Fu Siyan, only you would think of such a seamless trick.”

“This seamless embroidery has a slit. It is a slit that may take someone’s life.” If not, she would not have been worried. “This frightening slit is in the embroidery itself. Embroideries that have been dyed with Cat Tongue Flower as well as embroidered with transparent silk will not escape any expert seamstress eyes. If someone that is well-versed with the trade gets their hand on the Peacock Screen and checks, they will immediately find out. I asked Yang Bo to help me bring the Peacock Screen back but it was nowhere to be found. I am worried that it has fallen into the hands of someone with ill-intentions.”

Li Baolin suddenly stood up. “Fu Siyan, we were like sisters just now. But now, we are no longer sisters.”

Fu Rou froze as her eyes glistened, she was unflinching. She believed in Li Baolin.

“Have you heard of the Life Exchange Paper?” Li Baolin asked seriously.

“Life Exchange Paper?” Fu Rou shook her head

“When living in the harem, everywhere is full of thorns. With every

step you take, you may fall into a trap. Amongst us weak women, there will always be a few that we trust and rely on. You trust me enough to tell your life-threatening secret to me. You entrusted your life to me. This is the Life Exchange Paper that you have given me. From today onwards, we are not just surface level sisters, we are in a relationship where we would exchange our lives for each other.” As Li Baolin finished speaking, she took out something from her room.

Fu Rou stood up in shock. “This...”

If that wasn't the Peacock Embroidery, what was it?

“This is the life-threatening slit on your seamless embroidery.” Li Baolin handed it over to her. “Ever since I heard you speak on behalf of Princess Xinnan and even suggested using the Peacock Screen to choose her consort, I have been paying attention. Don't forget that I am also from the Seamstress Department and have been your subordinate before. My attention would always first be on the embroidery.”

Fu Rou breathed a sigh of relief. “No wonder Yang Bo could not find it. You scared me.”

“Just now, if you did not treat me as one of your own and hid from me, I would not have handed this over to you. As to whom I would have handed it to, I am sure you can guess. Ultimately, deceiving the Emperor is a crime and no one would dare to have a part in it. The punishment is death. Even knowing and not reporting is a crime worthy of death.” Li Baolin stated clearly. “Just in case, I even instructed some attendants to throw a Peacock Screen into the broken basket to replace this. All the embroideries in the palace are custom-made, coincidentally I had one that was similar. Of course, I even pierced two holes in it. Now, we are in the same boat.”

“Because I trust you, that is why you trust me.” Fu Rou understood.

“You could entrust me with your life. Therefore, I can entrust you with mine.” Li Baolin smiled slightly.

“This is true friendship.” Fu Rou was extremely touched.

lol hope you didn't get a heart attack :P

I actually thought Li Baolin was going to betray Fu Rou. It's good to see true friendship in the palace!

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When Lu Qi met with Grand Prince Liang in the early morning, he was fuming mad. After tossing and turning in bed the whole night and consulting the best seamstress in Chang'an, he still could not find out anything amiss. However, he was now certain that Fu Rou had a part to play in this!

“Lu Qi, why did you drag me out to the palace gates so early? What is going on?” Grand Prince Liang was still feeling sleepy.

“Of course it is to invite Your Highness out to have fun with women.” Lu Qi chuckled. *As long as Fu Rou ends up in the hands of Grand Prince Liang, she would not be able to beg for her life nor death!*

Just as the two were speaking to each other, Fu Rou walked out from the palace gates. Her bright eyes and elegant figure immediately captured the attention of Grand Prince Liang.

“Your Highness, look, it is Sheng Chumu.” Lu Qi swivelled around and pointed towards the streets.

Grand Prince Liang observed Fu Rou hurrying over towards Sheng Chumu. Although he could not hear what they were talking about, he saw that they were talking and laughing together. They also appeared to be very intimate.

He scoffed coldly, “I had planned on teaching a lesson to that Sheng

Chumu brat but I was distracted when my brother gifted me with two blonde haired and blue eyed foreign beauties. I shall let Sheng Chumu and his woman live for another day. Once they have had their bellies full of happiness and joy, I will take action and bring them down to hell from heaven.”

“Grand Prince Liang, you are very wise!” Lu Qi praised, “In the future, Sheng Chumu will only be left with this last happy memory of him and Fu Siyan. He has no idea that he will be sending his lover back to the palace and giving her to Your Highness. This lesson will be gut wrenching for him.”

Grand Prince Liang snickered, “Anyone who goes against me will have to suffer.”

Sheng Chumu and Fu Siyan did not know that they were being targeted by Grand Prince Liang. They paid a visit to the Fu family before heading to the outskirts for a walk.

“Don’t worry about Sister Yin, I will look for her.” Sheng Chumu understood Fu Rou’s personality well and knew that she was most concerned about her family.

“There must be a reason why she only left behind a letter and voluntarily left on her own. I have a feeling that even if we find her, she might not want to return.” Fu Rou sighed, “I am more confused than upset. It is only now that I realise that my time in Guangzhou was so peaceful and valuable. I feel that people are always exiting my life. Third Madam is no longer around, Brother Tao has left and Sister Yin is missing. Chen Ji was alive and well and in the next instant he was dead. A palace maid wanted to reduce the number of rats in the kitchen and brought poison into the palace. She...she was killed by Her Majesty. Another internal attendant was also implicated and was killed. I cannot have anyone by my side.”

Sheng Chumu grabbed Fu Rou’s hand and whispered, “You still have me.”

Fu Rou stared deeply at Sheng Chumu and smiled. “Yes, I still have you.”

“Oh yes, Chuling wanted me to convey his thanks to his future sister-in-law.”

Fu Rou laughed, “Who agreed to be his sister-in-law? None of you behaves seriously. Princess Xinnan and I get along well and I helped her because I really liked her.”

“You can continue to be stubborn. Are you sure the one you like is Princess Xinnan? You like me; the handsome, strong and unrivalled Sheng Chumu.”

Fu Rou was speechless but smiled internally. Sheng Chumu could always make her laugh and that was one of the reasons why liked him. He could make the heaviest burdens on her shoulders disappear in an instant.

Sheng Chumu took the opportunity of her good mood and stammered, “Rou’er, Ma Hainiu...”

“You don’t have to explain.” Fu Rou immediately placed her index finger on Sheng Chumu’s lips.

“Ah? I am not even allowed to explain?” Sheng Chumu mistook her intentions. “I have been severely wronged. It must be that idiot Chuling who did not explain things properly to you.”

“No.” Fu Rou shook her head, “Chumu, when I heard that you died, I begged the heavens and promised that I will treat you well as long as you return. As long as you are alive, I will not be picky about anything. And I trust you.”

Sheng Chumu’s heart jumped and he stared deeply into Fu Rou’s eyes before taking her hand once again.

“A person’s life is too feeble. You think that it will last for very long but when you think back, you realise how short it was. Compared to you being alive, Yan Zifang and Ma Hainiu are nothing. Chumu, I do not know how long this journey will be. So many people have lost their lives along the way and I am very scared. You must hold tightly onto my hand and never let go.”

Sheng Chumu firmly nodded. It was a sweet moment between the

two of them when Ma Hainiu and Ma Haihu suddenly charged over.

“What are you trying to do?” Sheng Chumu’s confidence was soaring after hearing Fu Rou’s words.

“I am not here for you.” Ma Hainiu turned and pointed at Fu Rou. “I do not care if you are Prince Zhou’s woman or Leader Yan’s woman, but I am warning you, Sheng Chumu is mine!”

Fu Rou gazed at Ma Hainiu.

“Trust me, I have been acknowledged...” Ma Hainiu pulled out the letter containing Sheng Chuling and Sheng Chujun’s fingerprints. “Your brothers are on my side. The evidence is in black and white.”

Sheng Chumu snatched the paper over, pushing away Ma Hainiu who refused to let go of it. Ma Haihu fumed with rage when he saw Sheng Chumu’s violence towards his sister and he threw a punch at Sheng Chumu. However, Sheng Chumu refused to back down as he tore the paper and retaliated against Ma Haihu.

Fu Rou stepped out but Ma Hainiu suddenly pointed a dagger towards her neck.

“I do not normally hit women. However, anyone who steals my man from me shall die.”

Fu Rou remained cold and calm. “Young lady, you can be anyone’s wife as long as you do not achieve it through violence.”

“Then what should I do?” Ma Hainiu spoke directly, “I like him but he likes you. Since I cannot get what I want through kind ways, I can only use violence.”

“If you want to enter the Duke Lu Residence, you have to do work for him and obtain the acknowledgement of his family.” Fu Rou continued, “You are not wrong in this aspect. However, Sheng Chumu is the oldest, why would he listen to his younger brothers?”

“Could it be...that I must obtain the fingerprints of Duke Lu and his wife?” Ma Hainiu wondered aloud.

“Young people can learn. Do you know who Sheng Chumu listens to the most?” Fu Rou did not want to disturb Sheng Chumu’s parents.

“Who?” Ma Hainiu’s eyes widened.

“Consort Han.” Fu Rou laughed lightly.

In an instant, Ma Hainiu turned and dashed off. Ma Haihu quickly followed her, stopping his fight with Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu smirked, “I did not know that you could be so cruel.”

Fu Rou threw him a side glance. “How am I cruel?”

“Asking Ma Hainiu to find my sister. Is that not cruel?” It was not like he didn’t know how influential his sister could be. She stopped him from bringing any girl home.

“Alright, I am cruel. If you do not like it, you can chase after her.” Fu Rou smiled brightly.

“Don’t even think about it.” Sheng Chumu hugged Fu Rou.

“According to what Ma Hainiu said, you are my ship. My one and only ship.”

Ma Hainiu wore a peony flowered dress and carried a large bowl of water on her head as she struggled to learn the proper etiquettes of a lady. She would never have imagined herself falling into Fu Rou’s trap even as she was repeatedly beaten by the etiquette teachers with a ruler.

Fu Rou had also suffered in the hands of Consort Han before she entered the palace due to an unexpected turn of events. She had no way to get out, let alone the careless Ma Hainiu.

Ma Hainiu could not stand the work that she was put through. If she had known this beforehand, she would never have gone to Consort Han. Consort Han only mentioned that she had to be like Fu Rou, learn the proper manners, read books and learn embroidery in order to marry Sheng Chumu. Ma Hainiu had been rash and had

immediately agreed to Consort Han thinking that it was going to be an easy process. Who would have expected to go through the bone-breaking suffering that she had to go through now.

Consort Han gleefully watched Ma Hainiu for half an hour before she said, "The first round today will be two hours. From tomorrow onwards, it will be three hours long."

Dumbfounded, Ma Hainiu blinked her eyes and asked, "There is another lesson tomorrow?"

"The sitting posture is basic knowledge. You have to persevere everyday. Oh yes, as the wife of a Duke, you must also be knowledgeable in literature." Consort Han waved and called for the palace maids to bring a stack of books. "Normally, I would give three days to memorize these books. However, I will give you four days. Fu Rou has also memorized these books."

Another two palace maids brought an embroidery screen forward.

"This is Fu Rou's work and it is considered average among other things she has embroidered. She has also embroidered a peony screen that the Empress really liked and brought to the palace." Ma Hainiu was about to speak but Consort Han interrupted her, "Rest assure, I favor you more than Fu Rou and I will not demand that you embroider better than her. As long as you can roughly achieve the standard of this embroidery screen, it will be good enough." *She could only blame her brother for attracting the wrong people. However, it seemed that Fu Rou was the good fortune that her brother attracted.*

"I have never held a needle my whole life." Ma Hainiu pouted and wore a pitiful expression. She only knew how to pick up swords.

"Do you not want to marry my brother?" Consort Han frowned. *Was she going to give up so easily?*

"I... I want to." Ma Hainiu's eyebrows furrowed together.

"I am putting in so much effort just so that you can beat Fu Rou and walk into the Duke Lu Residence proudly. Are you not willing to do something so simple for Chumu? Do you not have him in your

heart?” Consort Han shook her head and sighed.

“I do...!” Ma Hainiu rebutted loudly and was hit fiercely by the ruler from the teacher nearby.

Ma Hainiu whimpered and softly mumbled, “I have him in my heart...”

Consort Han sighed, “That is good. I will support you and you must persevere.” She turned around and instructed the servants beside her, “Let her stand for two hours then get her to memorize the books. Lastly, make her practice her embroidery. This is the future wife of a Duke, you must treat her well.”

The servants nodded in understanding.

Silly Ma Hainiu. Threatening Fu Rou with the knife wasn't cool though. Aaaiii.

She will play a more important role in the second volume!

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In the evening, Sheng Chumu accompanied Fu Rou to the palace gates before reluctantly bidding farewell to her.

“What day is it now? The cowherd boy and the weaver girl were banished to opposite sides of the Milky Way by the Empress Goddess. You and I are the living examples of them and the high walls of the palace is the Milky Way.”

“Then who is the Empress Goddess?” Fu Rou had already accepted her fate.

“Isn’t it obvious? It is the Empress...” Fu Rou quickly brought her hand up to clasp Sheng Chumu’s mouth. “You are so bold, you even dare to complain about the Empress.”

“I will even dare to go against the Emperor for you, not to mention a few complains.” Sheng Chumu was fearless and declared, “Rou’er, when I please the Emperor and there is an opportunity, I will ask for permission to bring you out of the palace.”

“Is it so easy to please the Emperor?” *Everything was always down to opportunities.*

“You may not know but the Emperor looks highly upon me. We can be together soon. Please just bear with it for a while longer.” Sheng Chumu was not only fearless, he was also proud of himself.

Fu Rou laughed, "Is it me bearing it or you?"

Sheng Chumu also laughed, "Hehe, we will bear it together." He pointed to his lips. "Kiss me and I will let you go."

"This is not appropriate in front of the palace gates. If someone spreads a rumour, we will no longer be able to see each other." Fu Rou had the foresight and she took more precaution.

Sheng Chumu did not press her further, knowing that she was right. He stared foolishly after her but did not enter the palace. He could bear the distance between him and her. However, the palace was merciless and he was afraid that he would lose her forever if he did not take action now.

When Fu Rou returned to her quarters, her underling, Li Zhangyan, informed her that the Imperial Concubine Sun had requested her audience at Yudan Palace. Fu Rou was puzzled but these were people of a higher rank than her and she could only be more cautious as she obeyed the orders.

Fu Rou walked into Yudan Palace but no one was there and only the candle lights danced in the dark. She was about to turn back to question the internal attendant that brought her here. To her surprise, the internal attendant had not followed her in but had quickly closed the door behind her. Fu Rou jumped in shock and rushed to open the door only to hear the sound of metal locks. She had been locked into the room.

"Fu Siyan's beauty is well regarded. Under the misty candle light, you are even more stunning." A well dressed man walked towards her from the inner depths of the palace.

Fu Rou swivelled around quickly. The man before her appeared smart and proper but he wore an evil grin. His eyes shone in the dark and a nasty look crossed his face. Fu Rou immediately guessed that he was Grand Prince Liang. He used Imperial Concubine Sun's name to lure her out. It was well known that Grand Prince Liang was unscrupulous and Fu Rou had heard about the incident of how he demanded for Princess Xinnan's servant, Zhenzhu.

Fu Rou wore a determined expression as she bowed respectfully. "Your Highness, I received Imperial Concubine Sun's orders to come here. Since Her Highness is not here, please excuse me."

"Fu Siyan, you must be mistaken. It was me who called you here, not my mother." Grand Prince Liang smiled, "I heard that you were a beauty in the palace and I have always wanted to see you. It was a coincidence that I saw you and General Xuanwei Chumu together today. He was an expert in womanizing in the past but he changed after he met you. I am very curious and wanted to meet you."

Grand Prince Liang stepped towards Fu Rou and circled her as he spoke. He breathed in deeply and sighed, "What a nice fragrance."

Fu Rou remained calm as she stepped backward and stealthily pulled out her hairpin.

Grand Prince Liang smirked and continued, "I cannot compare to General Xuanwei. As a royalty, my education and martial arts has always been taken care of. But can a little girl like you win over me?" He wore a dirtier smile and chuckled, "However, it is alright. It is more fun to play with someone with a feisty personality like you."

Fu Rou glared coldly at him. "I cannot compare to you based on strength. Even if I exchange my life for you, a royal born like you will not bother about me and see me as a mere ant."

"Since you are aware, why don't you take the opportunity? If I favor you, even an ant can rule the world." Grand Prince Liang bragged.

"If Your Highness is going to use force on me, I will have no other choice but to beg for death. However, before I die, I have a question for Your Highness. Can Your Highness show me some mercy and answer me?"

When Grand Prince Liang took another step towards her, Fu Rou placed her hairpin threateningly up to her neck.

She remembered Sheng Chumu mentioning that Sheng Chuling was on duty in the palace tonight. Because of her position, she also knew the guards' patrolling schedule and locations. She could call for help

but her chances were slim and she could only delay for time now.

Grand Prince Liang stopped in his tracks. He wanted to have more fun with her. “What question do you have for me?”

“I would like to know what kind of place Liangzhou is?” Fu Rou closely observed the oil in the lamps and calculated the time.

Grand Prince Liang could not guess what her intentions were and replied, “Liangzhou? Humph, that dogshit place. Its land is barren and the weather there is harsh. The food is also terrible and their women are not pretty.”

“How is it compared to Chang’an?”

“It cannot compare to Chang’an at all. One is the heavens and the other is the ground.” Grand Prince Liang scoffed.

Fu Rou took a deep breath.

Grand Prince Liang suddenly became suspicious. “Is this your final question before you die?”

Fu Rou nodded.

“Why?” Grand Prince Liang could not understand her.

Fu Rou smiled, “If I draw my hairpin across my neck, my life will be taken by you. Of course I am curious about what will happen to you.”

“What?” Grand Prince Liang blinked in confusion. “What will happen to me?”

“Isn’t Your Highness’ residence in Liangzhou? Isn’t it only natural for Your Highness to return to Liangzhou once I die?” Fu Rou laughed while warning Grand Prince Liang subtly.

“Nonsense!” Grand Prince Liang rebuked, “Do you think your measly death can decide a Grand Prince’s whereabouts? Beauty, you think too highly of yourself.”

“I do not dare to be so bold. My life is worth no more than a weed.

However, it can become the last straw that breaks the camel's back." Fu Rou cleverly continued, "When the Emperor was enthroned, he gave titles to numerous men. For the stability of the country, laws were enforced for them to follow. By now, there are few noblemen who have not retired back to their residences. Your Highness, you are the most notorious among them."

"I am the most notorious? Isn't Prince Han Litai and Prince Zhou Lige both still in Chang'an?" Grand Prince Liang was confident.

"Prince Han and Prince Zhou are both the beloved sons of His Majesty. But you are just his brother. Your Highness, you should ask yourself how important you are to His Majesty. If you are not that important in his eyes, and you commit a grave crime, do you think that your position in Chang'an can remain stable?"

Grand Prince Liang jumped in shock. "I did not expect that you are not only beautiful, you are also capable of deceiving others. I may not be very important in the eyes of my brother, but I am important in the eyes of my Imperial Father. Even if my brother does not give me face, he has to give in to my Imperial Father. After all, my Imperial Father is his father too."

"That is correct." It seems like Grand Prince Liang was not ignorant after all.

"That is why there is still a need for me, the last straw." Fu Rou held her hairpin in one hand and poured a glass of water with her other hand. "Everyone's patience is like this cup, there is a limit to it. For the Grand Emperor, the Emperor can tolerate your presence in Chang'an. On the surface, the Emperor is abiding by his filial duties properly."

When the cup of water was half-filled, Fu Rou suddenly stopped pouring and said, "Grand Prince Liang, you cannot always stay in your residence, do nothing, go out for a drink, create havoc and disturb the citizens. For a prince, this might not seem to be anything grave and the Emperor is benevolent in tolerating these actions." Fu Rou continued pouring water into the cup, "It is fine if you create havoc outside. But Your Highness caused a situation with Princess Xinnan's servant previously. After much contemplation, Princess

Xinnan begged the Grand Emperor to save her servant. She is the Emperor's beloved daughter and she must have complained to His Majesty after the event. Although the Emperor did not say anything, do you think he will have nothing against you after that?"

Fu Rou maneuvered her wrist and allowed water to drip into the cup.

Grand Prince Liang took a side glance and observed the half-filled cup. He said, "This cup is only half-filled, it can still hold some more water."

"Although my life is nothing more than an ant, it is worth something. Although I am a mere sixth-ranked Siyan that Your Highness does not look highly upon, you bullied the weak and forced the death of a ranked personnel. You are going against the laws of Great Tang. The Emperor abides by the laws of Great Tang closely and although he might not bother over the death of a mere servant, he would be against your unruly actions of not obeying the law. This concerns the law of this country. Furthermore, I am favored by the Empress and was just recently promoted to a Siyan. If my death is not investigated, how would it reflect on the Empress? In order to ensure the harem is ruled strictly, the Empress worked herself until she fell sick. If Your Highness creates trouble in the palace without regard for the rules in such a sensitive period, who would respect the Empress in the future? Everyone knows that the Emperor and Empress are loving to each other. If Your Highness gets on the bad side of the Empress..." Water overflowed the tea cup and spilled all over the table.

Fu Rou was calm as she placed the tea holder down. "Grand Prince Liang is the only one who can exhaust His Majesty's patience."

Grand Prince Liang fell silent for a moment and frowned. "You seem to make sense. If I end up being sent back to that disgusting place Liangzhou because of you, it would really not be worth it."

"Your Highness is wise." Fu Rou breathed a sigh of relief and continued, "The servants in Siyan Department would be worried if I am gone for so long. If Your Highness has no other instructions, I will take my leave. I will not tell anyone what happened here tonight."

“You may leave.”

“Thank you, Your Highness.” Fu Rou bowed. All of a sudden, Grand Prince Liang pounced forward and stopped her.

Wearing a crooked smile, Grand Prince Liang snickered. “You are so ignorant although you can speak well. I want to test our kinship and see whether my brother will send me to Liangzhou because of you.”

Fu Rou’s heart jumped but she could not escape the grasp of Grand Prince Liang. In an instant, Grand Prince Liang tore apart her collar.

Fu Rou shouted, “Stop! Let go of me! Someone help! Help me!”

Grand Prince Liang burst out into laughter. “You speak so confidently but you are as cowardly as a rabbit! Shout all you want, I wonder who will come and be a busybody!”

Fu Rou struggled to retrieve the hairpin in her sleeve before raising it threateningly at Grand Prince Liang. Compared to being taken advantage of him, Fu Rou would rather die with him.

Grand Prince Liang dodged nimbly but his chin was scratched by the hairpin. He cried out in pain, “Bitch, you don’t know who you should suck up to. I have always obtained anyone I want! Sheng Chumu is going to have to wear a green hat [1]!”

Grand Prince Liang gave Fu Rou a strong slap, and she fell onto the table helplessly.

Just as he was about to take another step, the doors suddenly opened and a figure seized his shoulder. Grand Prince Liang turned around and received a blow to his face.

It was Sheng Chuling. As per Fu Rou’s calculations, he had been passing by and happened to listen to her cries for help.

Grand Prince Liang and Sheng Chuling fought against each other, both of them equally on par. Grand Prince Liang shouted, “Someone help! There is an assassin! Someone help!”

Unexpectedly, instead of a guard, Prince Zhou walked into the scene.

His eyes instantly narrowed when he caught sight of Fu Rou's dishevelled self.

1. <https://www.italki.com/article/92/the-dark-meaning-of-5-chinese-terms?hl=en>

Grand Prince Liang is one of the characters I hated the most...

Court Lady

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“You! Get out!” Prince Zhou jutted his chin at Sheng Chuling, his eyes burning with anger.

“No!” Grand Prince Liang shouted, “He is an assassin! Guards!”

“Aren’t you leaving?” Prince Zhou raised his voice further.

Sheng Chuling knew that Prince Zhou liked Fu Rou. Since he had appeared, he should be able to protect Fu Rou. Hence, Sheng Chuling left. He had to rush home to inform Sheng Chumu.

Grand Prince Liang was fuming and stomped. “Lige, I am your uncle!”

“If you weren’t my uncle, do you think you would still be alive? This is the Royal Palace, not Da An Palace where Imperial Grandfather stays. You are not allowed to behave in such an unrestrained manner!”

Although Prince Zhou’s face was cold, deep down, he was ready to kill someone. No matter how much protection, it was not enough to protect Fu Rou from this pervert. Luckily, he had gone to look for Fu Rou tonight and heard that Imperial Concubine Sun had summoned Fu Rou to Yudan Palace. He had found it fishy and came to take a look. If he hadn't, something might have really happened.

Grand Prince Liang was cowardly at heart. "I will get back at you!" He pushed Prince Zhou and quickly left.

Prince Zhou and Fu Rou were the only ones left behind. They were speechless.

After a while, Prince Zhou sighed as he took off his coat and walked over. "About tonight, Grand Prince Liang is at fault. He should not dare to bring it up. However, I don't think he will just let you off like this."

Fu Rou's face was pale. "I know." She silently pushed away Prince Zhou's hand, which had moved to place the coat on her.

"Your Highness, please help me to call for two internal attendants to accompany me back." She also could not accept his kindness.

Prince Zhou's tone was sharp. "It was stupid enough for you to have gotten tricked into coming to Yudan Palace in the middle of the night. Now, you think that two internal attendants can protect you better than I can?" He did not allow her to argue as he placed the coat on her and tied the ribbon. "Let's go."

The two of them walked, one in front of the other. When they finally reached the main door of the Court Lady Department, Fu Rou broke the silence. "I kind of understand why Her Majesty was so strict about poison being taboo."

Prince Zhou did not reply but he was listening.

"Because the Royal Palace is a place where the strong mistreats the weak. There are schemes and traps everywhere. Every corner is filled with laments of the weak and filled with resentment. After staying in here for long, even the kindest person will start to have evil thoughts. They will think of solving their unspoken resentment with a cup of poison. To understand other people's pain is to understand one's own pain."

For a moment, she wanted to disregard everything and bring Grand Prince Liang down with her at all cost.

"Do you think it is worth it?" Deep down, Prince Zhou already knew

her answer.

“It is not worth it.” Fu Rou’s answer was as he expected. “As long as there are things I love that still remain on this earth, it is not worth it.”

“Since you don’t think it is worth it, then you should persevere. Do only the things that you think are worth it.” He did not know when but she had become his light. Every time he thought of her, his temper would dissolve and he could be himself.

“I will.” Fu Rou straightened her back and walked into the Court Lady Department.

Prince Zhou stood by the door for a while before leaving. No matter how Fu Rou felt towards him, he had decided to get his Imperial Father’s approval before Grand Prince Liang could. He was going to protect the woman he loved.

The next morning, there were three men kneeling in front of the Emperor. It was the first time that the Emperor thought that being a matchmaker was really not easy; he could neither laugh nor cry.

The first one who came was Prince Zhou. Prince Zhou had ignored the fact that the Emperor was discussing the Treasure Map with Yan Zifang and demanded an audience. Next, it was Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu did not care that the Emperor was talking about marriage with Prince Zhou and said that he had an extremely urgent matter for him to solve. Lastly, it was the person who was there first, Yan Zifang, who had cut Sheng Chumu off and knelt before the Emperor requesting for only one thing.

Surprisingly, they were all three outstanding men. One was his son, one was a Duke’s son and the last was once the so-called leader of the oceans. They were all requesting to marry the same woman. The new Siyan appointed by the Empress, Fu Rou!

Prince Zhou expressed that he had been moved by Fu Rou. Sheng Chumu said that he and Fu Rou had already pledged themselves to

each other. Yan Zifang was the most shocking. He said that he had a childhood engagement with Fu Rou and had a Pendant of Longevity as proof.

However, Concubine Yan was earlier than any of them. Moreover, Prince Zhou was his son, so the Emperor was bound to be biased.

He made a decision. "This Fu Siyan is not such a simple lady. One prince and two generals have fallen for her at the same time. Since you want me to make a decision, then I will make a decision. I have decided to let Fu Siyan..." His gaze landed on Prince Zhou.

The internal attendant, who had been running in and out all morning, ran in once again. He reported, "Your Majesty, the Grand Emperor has sent someone."

Prince Zhou and Sheng Chumu's expressions changed immediately. There was no need to mention how Prince Zhou knew. He personally experienced it last night. However, Sheng Chumu heard this from his brother. He went to investigate and found out that Lu Qi was the one that instigated Grand Prince Liang. The real person that they were targeting was him.

The Emperor patiently allowed them to enter.

The Grand Emperor's internal attendant greeted politely, "The Grand Emperor said that Grand Prince Liang is getting old, yet he does not have anyone by his side that knows how to attend to his comfort. On behalf of Grand Prince Liang, the Grand Emperor would like to request for someone to serve him."

The Emperor thought that this was an easy matter. "Which person would he like?"

"A palace lady from the Court Lady Department, Fu Siyan."

The Emperor was shocked. He did not expect that the Grand Emperor would bother with the matter of a palace lady. It seems like he had to handle this carefully.

"Fu Siyan is under the Empress. It is up to the Empress whether a palace lady can leave. I will not bother. The Empress can make the

decision.” He threw the hot potato over to his wife. All he wanted was to not burn himself.

When Consort Han heard about this, she immediately asked Sheng Chumu to visit her.

“Elder Sister, don’t worry. With Prince Zhou, Grand Prince Liang, Yan Zifang and me, it is a four choose one situation. I have half the chance.” Sheng Chumu remained calm.

Consort Han did not think so and was anxious on his behalf. “Do you really think you have a fifty percent chance of winning? Let me tell you. You probably don’t have any chance of winning. Much less a fifty percent chance!” This was not simple at all. Otherwise, why would the Emperor push the decision to the Empress and the Empress was using her illness as a way to procrastinate on making the decision? It was not easy at all.

“Grand Prince Liang’s father is the Grand Emperor. Prince Zhou’s father is the Emperor. Your father is just a Duke. How can he be compared to the Grand Emperor and Emperor? Just based on status, Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou triumphs over you. Amongst the four men, Imperial Mother will not even consider you, much less Yan Zifang who used to be a pirate. This situation is not a four choose one. It is a two choose one. Imperial Mother has to make a decision between Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou.”

Sheng Chumu did not make a sound. He studied military techniques before. How could he not know this? However, he was not going to give up on himself.

“If Imperial Mother ignores the Grand Emperor and the Emperor and allows you to marry Fu Rou, it would be the day where disaster befalls the Duke Lu Residence.”

“Elder Sister, can’t you help me think of a solution?” Sheng Chumu’s eyes shone. “Enter the palace and help me beg the Empress?”

“There is no point in begging.” Consort Han sighed, “If I did not force

Fu Rou to enter our Han Mansion back then to be a seamstress, she would not have been selected by Imperial Mother to enter the palace. The situation today would not have happened. Chumu, I have let you down.”

“Elder Sister, you make it sound like there is absolutely no hope.” Sheng Chumu’s eyes were filled with determination. “Heaven never blocks out one’s way. I will not let Fu Rou marry another man!”

Ultimately, Consort Han still believed that there was no hope. “Imperial Mother is dignified and you cannot offend her. Fu Rou is a good lady. However, now that things have reached this stage, you should not force it. There are so many other ladies that admire you, why would you need to worry about not being able to marry? Look at Lady Ma. She comes to Han Mansion everyday for you.”

Sheng Chumu was stunned. “She is still here? I thought you had already scared her away.”

“Initially, I thought I could scare her off. I did not expect her to persevere. She seems to be quite infatuated with you.” Consort Han was surprised as well.

“Infatuated? If you complete that sentence, it is infatuated and delusional! Don’t mention her. Every time I hear her name, I get annoyed.” Sheng Chumu waved impatiently.

“For you, she has been learning etiquette and embroidery. She even memorises books word for word. I don’t know how many times her fingers have been hit by a ruler.”

“Elder Sister, I have seen many women in my life but I have never seen one as shameless as her. She holds the antidote in one hand and shamelessly demands for the guy to marry her. The only reason why I am willing to deal with her is for the antidote. If not, I would have chased her far away.”

Consort Han’s expression soured. Sheng Chumu turned and saw Ma Hainiu standing outside the pavilion.

Ma Hainiu was frowning. “Sheng Chumu, I heard whatever you just

said. What explanation do you have for yourself?”

Sheng Chumu laughed, “If you heard everything, what is there for me to explain? I won’t explain.”

Ma Hainiu gritted her teeth. “Fine! Fine! I finally understand. You can rest assured. I don’t need you to chase me. I will stay far away from you in the future!” She turned and left.

Sheng Chumu shouted, “Don’t run away! What about my antidote? Since you have given up, you should be magnanimous and give the antidote to me. Even if you are a pirate, you have to be upright!”

Ma Hainiu turned back sharply, with tears running down her face. Her expression was one of sorrow mixed with anger. Sheng Chumu froze and watched her run away.

Aw, I actually feel a bit bad for Ma Hainiu. But if you want a partner, you should find someone that wants to be with you...

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Sheng Chumu was in trouble and Fu Rou was under pressure as well.

The entire morning was filled with people pointing and talking about her as well as those that tried to get on her good side. They all thought that Fu Rou must have some good skills to be able to attract four guys at once. They did not know how it felt to be caught in the middle. Her head was splitting.

This time, she went to Huayin Palace on her own accord. It was both to hide from other people as well as to have a heart to heart talk with her sworn sister.

Li Baolin smiled as she welcomed Fu Rou. "Congratulations, Fu Siyan. Bless you, Fu Siyan. It is almost time for you to fly onto a higher branch and become a phoenix."

Fu Rou sighed, "When other people say this, I bear with it. But if you say this as well, I am going to get angry."

"Don't get angry, I admit my mistake." Li Baolin held onto Fu Rou's arm as they walked into the palace.

Fu Rou repeated what happened the previous night.

"So that is what happened." Li Baolin surmised. "Grand Prince Liang is despicable, Yan Zifang is determined to carry out the engagement

both of you had when you were young. Prince Zhou just happened to be at the right place. Only you and Sheng Chumu are innocent and pitiful.”

“With so many people involved, the whole thing has blown up. Now, the decision is up to the Empress.” Although this was what Fu Rou said, she was extremely indignant.

Li Baolin could tell. “But the one in your heart...is the one that the Empress will definitely not choose. On the surface, it seems like a decision between four men but it actually is a decision between two.”

“Even you think this way?” *That is why she felt uneasy.*

“Anyone with a slightly functioning brain would think so. Would the Empress disappoint Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou to favour the Duke Lu Residence? What does Sheng Chumu have for the Empress to take this kind of risk for him?”

It was not that the Empress was cruel but this was the pressure of reality.

“But I can’t just sit and wait.” Fu Rou had never believed that success would come to those that did not do anything. Especially after she entered the palace, the various things she witnessed made her understand how lamentable it was for someone else to decide your fate.

“Now there is only one solution. It is for Her Majesty to not choose Grand Prince Liang or Prince Zhou.”

Shuangxi was looking around. A palace maid, Xi’er from the Rites Office, had arranged to meet her in the Imperial Garden. All of a sudden, she saw Fu Rou and Li Baolin walking in her direction and quickly hid herself.

Li Baolin said, “With Prince Zhou, only good days await you.”

Fu Rou replied, “I don’t wish for good days. I just want my future to be peaceful and not have people create trouble for me.”

“The Crown Princess was baselessly nitpicking on you when you were submitting embroideries to her. Everyone in the palace knows about it. Even the Empress said that the Crown Princess was not magnanimous. In the past, you were serving the Crown Princess and had to bear with her. In the future, you will become Prince Zhou’s consort. What can the Crown Princess do to you? I think the Crown Princess will be extremely jealous of you.”

“Why would she be jealous of me?”

Li Baolin continued, “Prince Zhou is talented and gentle. Since he has asked His Majesty for your hand, he must love you deeply. When you are married to Prince Zhou, you would naturally be loved and treated importantly. Whereas in the Crown Prince’s heart, the Crown Princess is not...with how the Eastern Palace is like recently, you should have heard about it right?”

Fu Rou shook her head. “It is too early to say, Her Majesty has yet to issue an Imperial Decree.”

“I think it is a matter of days before she issues the Imperial Decree. Would anything change in these few days?” Li Baolin believed that the nail had been hammered.

“If someone has other intentions, I am afraid...” Fu Rou lowered her voice.

Shuangxi was delighted that she was standing near to them and could hear everything clearly. When Fu Rou and Li Baolin left, she came out of hiding, looking thoughtful.

Xi’er rushed to her. “Sister Shuangxi, I am sorry for coming late. The palace lady on duty suddenly asked to retrieve a pair...”

Shuangxi turned and walked away. “Xi’er, I have to leave now.”

“Eh?” Xi’er found it strange. “I still have something to tell you. The rose powder that you asked me to make...”

“Let’s talk about the rose powder later.” Shuangxi was in a rush to get back to the Eastern Palace. “I have something urgent to do.”

Xi'er looked on as Shuangxi left. She then turned to look at one of the corners of the garden. Rites Official Wu nodded at her.

Rites Official Wu turned. "We have done as you instructed." Standing behind her were Fu Rou and Li Baolin.

Li Baolin muttered, "Isn't Prince Zhou a pretty good candidate? It is such a pity that you want to cut him out."

Fu Rou could not be bothered with her as her gaze settled. *Unless it is Sheng Chumu, she did not want anybody!*

Consort Han was restless as she sat in front of Lizheng Palace. She held a brocade box in her hands. Chumu had actually personally sewed a portion of a handkerchief and wanted her to deliver it. She did not dare to do anything under her Imperial Mother's eyes and had to think of a way to do it openly.

Wei Song came up to her.

Consort Han smiled, "Is Imperial Mother feeling better?"

Wei Song shook his head. "Her Majesty has been feeling tired these few days. There are too many things going on and she cannot help but worry."

Is he trying to say that she is adding to her troubles? She could not help but scold her brother internally. When she entered the palace, she greeted the Empress but did not speak immediately.

Empress Zhangsun then asked, "How come you dropped by today?"

"I heard that Imperial Mother was not feeling well and I was worried." *Her eldest younger brother was even more worrying.* "Imperial Mother, how are you feeling?"

"Are you really here to see how I am doing? Did no one tell you about Fu Siyan's issue?"

"I have indeed heard of the issue regarding Fu Siyan. However, the

reason why I entered today is definitely not to plead on behalf of my brother, Sheng Chumu.”

“Oh?” Empress Zhangsun found it hard to believe.

“Who Fu Siyan will marry is Imperial Mother’s decision. It is not my place to speak. It is just that she stayed at the Han Mansion for a period of time and I am quite fond of her. No matter who she marries, I will be happy for her. Hence, I prepared a small gift for her. I hope you will allow me to give it to her.” Consort Han handed the brocade box over.

Empress Zhangsun gestured for Wei Song to open the brocade box. She took out the handkerchief and looked at it. “Although I did not expect you to have much embroidery skills, these stitches are too untidy. You should practice more.”

Consort Han felt awkward. “Yes.”

Empress Zhangsun did not say more as she instructed Wei Song to send the handkerchief over to Fu Rou.

Consort Han silently breathed a sigh of relief. “Imperial Mother, please take care of yourself. I will take my leave.”

Zhangsun nodded as she looked at Consort Han leave. She was feeling satisfied. Consort Han did not ask for anything demanding and was much steadier.

The internal attendants reported that Xinnan was requesting an audience.

Consort Han had just left and Princess Xinnan was already here. This made Empress Zhangsun assume that Consort Han was trying to be cunning. She believed that Consort Han instigated Xinnan to say whatever she did not dare to bring up.

Wei Song advised, “Your Majesty, you have not met Her Highness. Why are you already getting angry? Maybe the Princess is just here to greet Your Majesty and has no other intentions.”

“Call her in. We will find out if she has any other intentions. If she

dares to speak up for Sheng Chumu, I will punish her and Consort Han together.” *Let’s see if they still dare to try any tricks.*

Xinnan entered. “I heard that Imperial Mother is not feeling well. Are you feeling better today?”

Empress Zhangsun pointed out, “If there weren’t so many things troubling me, I would naturally feel better.”

“Then--” Xinnan leaned on Empress Zhangsun and acted cute. “Let me share your worries.”

“Share my worries?” Empress Zhangsun narrowed her eyes. “Are you talking about the issue with Fu Siyan?”

“Imperial Mother, you are very smart. Don’t you have a headache because you’re unsure of who to give Fu Siyan to?”

“It seems like you have an idea?”

Xinnan noticed Empress Zhangsun’s face turned serious. “That’s right. That’s right. I have a good idea.”

Empress Zhangsun snorted, “Does this idea have anything to do with Consort Han’s younger brother, Sheng Chumu?”

“No, no! I truly want to help share your worries. It has nothing to do with Sheng Chumu or Consort Han. I swear!”

“Then I am slightly relieved. Now that you are much older, you can’t behave like you did before. You can’t say and do things without thinking and you should be careful of being used by others.”

“Why would I be used by others? I understand what is going on.” Xinnan did not think that Empress Zhangsun would tie her and Consort Han together. “...I have an idea...”

“Speak then.” There was no harm in listening.

“Then I shall be frank. I think that Imperial Mother will not choose Sheng Chumu nor consider Yan Zifang. The real reason why you are having a headache is because of Grand Prince Liang. Imperial

Mother, you know what Grand Prince Liang's personality is like. However, if you don't let Grand Prince Liang have Fu Siyan, you will be offending Imperial Grandfather. But if you let Grand Prince Liang have Fu Siyan, Fu Siyan will be extremely unlucky. Grand Prince Liang will definitely torture her. Imperial Mother, you are so kind, I am sure you can't bear to arrange such an ill fate for Fu Siyan right? You are now torn between Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou right?"

Empress Zhangsun did not respond to her question but said, "Continue."

Xinnan was proud. "My idea is definitely the best idea on earth. That will be to--see heaven's will."

Empress Zhangsun raised her brows. "Heaven's will?"

"Imperial Mother, there is a famous face reader. When he read and predicted Du Yan, Wang Gui and Wei Ting's faces, they were all accurate. He is amazing and profound. Even Imperial Father could not help but praise him. Since Imperial Mother has met with a dilemma, asking him would be the best." Xinnan opened her fingers, counting out two words. "Master Yuan."

"You really like to stray from convention." *What an idea.* Empress Zhangsun smiled, "However, the issue with Fu Siyan is not that big of a dilemma to the point that I have to seek out Master Yuan. You can go."

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When Empress Zhangsun saw Sun Lingshu, she thought that these few days were bustling with activity. Her entire family had come to greet her, one after the other.

“Didn’t I tell you that you can pass on greeting me? With your condition now, you should not be moving around.”

“I came today to greet you as well as to tell you something else.”

When Shuangxi repeated whatever she had eavesdropped on to Sun Lingshu, Sun Lingshu could not sit still. She had created trouble for Fu Rou previously. If Fu Rou were to become Prince Zhou’s consort, in the future Fu Rou would be able to stand proud in front of her. Sun Lingshu would not be able to take it. Luckily, Shuangxi overheard Fu Rou talking and found out her weakness. As long as she took the chance, Fu Rou could forget about perching on a branch as high as Prince Zhou’s.

“I heard that Imperial Mother was intending to let Fu Siyan become Prince Zhou’s consort?”

Empress Zhangsun frowned. “Crown Princess, you should just take care of yourself and not bother about other things. This has nothing to do with the Eastern Palace.”

Sun Lingshu hurriedly spoke, “Imperial Mother, you are wrong.”

Empress Zhangsun's gaze sharpened. "What did you say?"

"Forgive my impudence. Please calm down, Imperial Mother." Sun Lingshu softened her tone. "I mean if Fu Siyan follows Prince Zhou, it will have something to do with the Eastern Palace. The personal relationships that Fu Siyan has in the palace cannot be something Prince Zhou uses to deal with the Crown Prince in the future."

"Personal relationships in the palace?" Empress Zhangsun controlled her expression.

"Imperial Mother, think about it. Why would Prince Zhou, who is such a young and talented prince, desire Fu Siyan and would even fight Grand Prince Liang for her? Could it only be because of her looks? Fu Siyan is a very smart and bright person. What she is best at is not her embroidery but how she is able to get everyone to like her. Although she hasn't been in the palace for long, is there anyone in the six offices and twenty-four departments that is more outstanding than her? She wins over her superiors and subordinates and creates relationships with various consorts and princesses. When that happens, will there be anything that happens in the palace that Concubine Yan will not know?"

"She has good relations with various imperial consorts and princesses?" Empress Zhangsun did not think of this.

"Prince Zhou has always been favoured by Imperial Father and this has been a hidden danger for the Eastern Palace. Imperial Mother, you must definitely not allow Prince Zhou to increase his power in the palace through Fu Siyan. For the Crown Prince, you cannot let Fu Siyan marry Prince Zhou."

Empress Zhangsun fell silent for a moment. "I understand. Please return to your palace."

Sun Lingshu knew that she had definitely succeeded. After all, Empress Zhangsun was most concerned about the Crown Prince. She would not overlook even the slightest threat to the Crown Prince.

On the same day, Empress Zhangsun invited the Emperor. She told him that she was still having difficulty in deciding between Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou.

“A dilemma?” The Emperor was not pleased. “You have always been a decisive person. Why is this small issue difficult for you? In my opinion, isn’t Prince Zhou a good choice? Of course, I handed it over to you so you have the final decision. I am just stating my opinion. I will not interfere.”

His response was exactly as Empress Zhangsun expected. The Emperor was biased towards Concubine Yan. She became even more determined.

“I have always treated Prince Zhou as one of my own. I would definitely hope for him to get what he wants. However, the Grand Emperor has stated clearly that he wishes for someone to be by Grand Prince Liang. Fu Siyan is considerate and bright, she could take care of him. As a daughter-in-law, if I ignore the Grand Emperor’s wishes, I will be considered unfilial. How can I be unfilial?”

“Are you really thinking of handing Fu Siyan over to Grand Prince Liang?” The Emperor frowned.

“I understand what you are thinking. Grand Prince Liang has always been disrespectful to palace maids and ladies. I have heard of his various misdeeds. I have only kept silent for Grand Emperor’s sake. Indeed, I should not hand any more palace maids or ladies to him and increase his overweening attitude. But we need to give the Grand Emperor a reason.”

“What do you intend to do?” The Emperor was curious.

“Heaven’s will.” Empress Zhangsun smiled slightly. “On the same day, four men asked Your Majesty for a palace lady’s hand. It is uncommon so we should use an uncommon method to resolve it. I was having a headache initially, but Xinnan gave me a good idea.”

“What idea did Xinnan give?” The Emperor could not think of anything.

“Master Yuan. Master Yuan’s skills are incomparable. Your Majesty even praised him for his ability to read faces and predict futures before. I was thinking of going to Qingfeng Monastery for some air and bringing Fu Siyan along for Master Yuan to read her face. I would like to see what her fate is like. If Prince Zhou is blessed in Fu Siyan’s fate, Master Yuan’s reading will help us convince the Grand Emperor. What do you think?”

“We will do as you suggest.” He was the one that left the decision to the Empress and it was too late to change anything.

“Thank you for your permission.” Empress Zhangsun was reassured.

However, the Emperor was gloomy as he stood up to leave. “Concubine Yan is not feeling well and has been coughing. I am worried and I am going to check on her.”

It was rare that Concubine Yan requested something from him. Who would have expected the Empress, who has always been docile, would go against his will. Now that things were out of his control, he was not feeling fine. Treating Prince Zhou as her own? Ultimately, Prince Zhou was not the Empress’ biological son and she just did not want Concubine Yan and her son to get what they wished for.

The news about the Empress going to seek Master Yuan quickly spread to the Han Mansion.

Sheng Chumu purposely ran over to confirm this with Consort Han. When he realised that it was true, he was excited. Everything was going according to plan. Now, all he needed was to set out on his journey.

Ma Hainiu suddenly appeared and handed over a small box. “Consort Han, this is the antidote for your brother.”

Sheng Chumu was suspicious. “You are giving it so easily? Is it poison?”

Ma Hainiu refused to look at Sheng Chumu. “It is up to you whether

you want to believe me. I have given up on you anyway.”

Consort Han gestured to her servants to take it. “Thank you. I hope that you will find a man that belongs to you. Just treat these few days of hard work as fate with our Han Mansion.”

Ma Hainiu asked, “Can I continue learning?”

Consort Han was stunned. “Why?”

Ma Hainiu replied, “I want to become someone who is responsible for myself. I want to be someone that is proud of myself and not have to rely on anyone.”

Consort Han smiled in approval. “That’s right. Women should strive for independence.”

“Consort Han, I have finished reading the books. Can you give me more?” Ma Hainiu took the initiative to ask for books to read.

Sheng Chumu cut in, “Ma Hainiu, you are so rough, I never thought you would know how to read?”

Ma Hainiu ignored him.

“Oi, Ma Hainiu, I am talking to you.”

Ma Hainiu eventually turned to look at him and greeted him politely. “Consort Han, you have a guest. I shall not interrupt.” She then turned and left.

“Oi, oi. Are you pretending that I don’t exist?” Sheng Chumu shouted at her.

Ma Hainiu did not turn back and stepped out of the door. A triumph smile appeared on her face as she muttered to herself, “Lian Yan’er was right. If I ignore you, you will chase after me.”

It was not that Ma Hainiu did not care anymore, but she had changed her tactic. Lian Yan’er taught her three golden rules. First of all, make the person owe you. Secondly, don’t chase after the other party. Lastly, she had to be independent.

Sheng Chumu was confused. "Elder Sister, what medicine did you give her?"

Consort Han snorted, "Are you regretting? She clearly said that she no longer wants you!"

Sheng Chumu glared. "I am only suspicious because she changed so quickly." He waved and took his leave. "Elder Sister, I am leaving. I still have something important to do for my future happiness."

Consort Han mumbled to herself, "I hope everything will go smoothly this time. If he can marry Fu Rou, I will feel less guilty."

The sound of bird's chirping floated in, causing Fu Yin to feel even more frustrated.

Although her second sister managed to survive the issue with the Peacock Screen, she heard that there were four men asking to marry Fu Rou. Amongst them, Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou both had strong backings. She knew that Fu Rou had her heart set on Brother Chumu; she would not want either Grand Prince Liang or Prince Zhou.

All of a sudden, someone hugged her from behind. Lu Qi's high-spirited voice floated into her ears.

"Yin'er, do you hear the magpies calling?"

Fu Yin turned around and gently pushed him away. "So they are magpies, I was not paying attention to them."

Lu Qi tapped her head. "Little fool. I mentioned magpies, you should naturally ask what happy event will be happening."

"Oh?" Fu Yin was obedient. "What happy event?"

Lu Qi was proud. "It is highly classified, I cannot tell you. You just need to understand that it is a blessing in disguise."

This morning, he had followed his father to court. They got an

important task from the Empress. The Empress wanted to seek out Master Yuan. However, her usual bodyguard, General Fan, was not feeling well. Hence, she requested Lu Qi to substitute for him. If he did this well, he would gain the appreciation of Her Majesty and his future would be bright.

Lu Qi embraced Fu Yin once more. “Come, kiss me. Let’s celebrate.”

Fu Yin blushed and pushed him away. “Don’t fool around.”

Lu Qi smiled. “Until now, you are still so shy. However, I like to see you blush.”

Lu Yingying walked into the study room. As she saw them, she immediately covered her eyes. “Aiya, the two of you in broad daylight...”

Lu Qi released Fu Yin. “Who asked you to come in? Didn’t I tell you to inform before you enter? Do you have something for me?”

Lu Yingying wrinkled her nose. “Who is looking for you? I am looking for Yin’er.” She gestured to Yin’er. “Yin’er, come to my room. Help me to make a braided pendant.”

Lu Qi did not agree. “Don’t you have your own servant? You are always looking for my Yin’er.”

“Eh, since when did she become your Yin’er? I got goosebumps from hearing that.” Lu Yingying stuck out her tongue playfully. “Yin’er is the most skillful. I only want her. Come Yin’er, I will give you something nice to eat.”

As Lu Qi saw his sister drag Fu Yin away, he wanted to stop her but decided that he had more important things to do. When the Empress goes on a trip, the guards following her have a heavy responsibility. If anything goes wrong, someone could lose their life.

Fu Yin nimbly made the braided pendant. Her ten fingers were organised as they combed and braided. It was as if each of her fingers had a mind of their own.

“Your handiwork is so good.” Lu Yingying was amazed.

“Speaking of good, my sister is...” Fu Yin froze, she had slipped up.

“I thought you had no more family members.” Lu Yingying did not think much into it.

“She is my distant cousin. After my family was ruined, we no longer kept in contact.” Fu Yin whispered.

“Don’t brood on things in the past. It is your fate to enter our Duke Chen Residence.” Lu Yingying was caring. “Moreover, I quite admire you.”

“What is there to admire?” Fu Yin was confused.

“I am envious that you can be with the one you like everyday.” Seeing how intimate and sweet she was with her elder brother, Lu Yingying felt slightly jealous.

Fu Yin froze. “The one I like...”

“If I could happily be with the person I like, I am willing to do anything even if it is just for a month, a day or even just an hour.” Lu Yingying continued.

Fu Yin laughed bitterly, “You are so pretty and gentle, you will definitely be able to happily be with the one you love forever.”

Lu Yingying was absent-minded. “Forever? He is not even happy to see me. Let’s not talk about me. Let me tell you, my elder brother really cares for you. In the past, when I ordered his servant, he did not care at all. Now, I just ask you to help me make a braided pendant and he glares at me. Heartless. Now that he has someone he likes, he no longer cares about me, his sister.”

“Not only have you snatched my girl, you are also talking bad about me.” Lu Qi walked in. “I lent you Yin’er for half a day, yet you don’t even remember my kindness.”

Lu Yingying rebuked, “Elder Brother, you should not eavesdrop, it is bad.”

Fu Yin added, “The braided pendant is done.”

“If you are done, come with me, I waited so long for you. There is no one to pour tea for me.” Lu Qi pulled Fu Yin out.

Meanwhile, Lu Qi did not know that his plans, the time, route and duty roster, had all been noted down by Lu Hanxing and given to Hong Yide.

Previously, after Lu Hanxing suffered a beating from Lu Qi, he went out to drown his sorrows. Unfortunately, he was abducted by Hong Yide. The both of them had sinister motives and realised that they both wanted to get back at Lu Yunji and Lu Qi. Hence, they had hit off and decided to collude.

The scene with Lu Hanxing and Hong Yide colluding was in episode 22.

I know some of you are bothered by how fast paced the novel is. It will slow down in volume 2 (from chapter 50 onwards)

Court Lady

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In Ganlou Palace, the Emperor was still in contemplation.

Everyone always praised the Empress for being virtuous. The Emperor also respected her greatly. However, when it came to Prince Zhou, she was always harsh. He knew that she was trying her best to solidify the Crown Prince's position. Unfortunately, this time it made him unhappy.

It was simply to help Prince Zhou get the girl he admired to accompany him. After all, he owed Concubine Yan and her son too much over the years. Moreover, Concubine Yan personally asked him for it. He really could not understand why the Empress was trying to block them.

"Your Majesty." Chief Cao entered to report, "Her Majesty has set out for Cangshan Mountain. Everything has been prepared, do you have any other instructions?"

The Emperor remained silent.

Chief Cao continued, "This morning, Grand Prince Liang accompanied the Grand Emperor to visit Her Majesty. I am not sure what they spoke about but the Grand Emperor praised Her Majesty for being virtuous when he came out. He also mentioned that Zhiyun's death anniversary was nearing and he wanted to head to Cangshan Mountain as well."

The Emperor raised his brows. “Zhiyun’s death anniversary is coming soon? I have forgotten about it.”

Chief Cao replied, “Her Majesty has remembered it on your behalf.”

The Emperor could not fathom. “She has always known to please her elders. Even when I get scolded as if there is nothing good about me, she is the best daughter-in-law. She actually knows how to use Zhiyun’s death anniversary as an excuse. I have no choice but to accept it.”

“Your Majesty, if you are feeling frustrated about Prince Zhou’s issue, why don’t you speak up for Prince Zhou before the Empress does anything?” Chief Cao was talkative.

“I have already expressed my stance to her the previous night. However, the Empress was exceptionally determined this time. There are palace rules. Since I have already handed the decision over to the Empress, I cannot take back my words and hurt the Empress’ reputation. Moreover, if I forcefully interfere and demand the Empress to give Fu Siyan to Prince Zhou, the Empress might give in but she might get back at Prince Zhou in the future. When I am no longer around, the Crown Prince will inherit the throne. The Empress will become the Grand Empress. I cannot strain the relationship between the Empress and Prince Zhou. I have to think for Prince Zhou’s future.” If he had known this earlier, he would not have handed this matter over to her.

“Your Majesty is a kind father.”

“I only pity Prince Zhou. He will be disappointed once again.” He had the world in his hands but could not do much for this child of his.

“In Xinzhou, the mud inkstone is a high quality inkstone. It produces black ink that does not destroy the brush. Amongst the mud inkstone, the Yellow Eel inkstone is the best. However, it is not easy to obtain. This time, the Xinzhou Prefecture presented twenty-eight mud inkstones. There are only three Yellow Eel inkstones. Prince Zhou enjoys calligraphy and painting very much. He will understand your intentions.”

The Emperor understood what Chief Cao meant and laughed bitterly. "I am afraid that no matter how good this gift is, it will be difficult to suppress the disappointment he feels. Forget it, giving is better than not giving at all. Bring my jade brush over. Give it to him."

Chief Cao went to carry out his orders.

Fu Rou held onto an outer robe as she walked towards Lizheng Palace. She coincidentally met with Prince Zhou, who had just received his gift. She greeted him unenthusiastically. She knew his admiration for her but her heart was already set.

"Fu Siyan, this is..." Prince Zhou looked at her and keenly realised, "You are going out?"

"The Empress is going on a trip, I am to go along." Fu Rou was surprised. She thought that Prince Zhou would have known.

"When the Empress goes on a trip, isn't it usually palace ladies from the Office of Rites that go along? Why would a palace lady from the Court Lady Department need to go?" Prince Zhou did not know and no one could bear to tell him the news.

"I am just following orders. Her Majesty instructed me to follow her to Fengtian Monastery, so I am going." Fu Rou smiled.

"Fengtian Monastery? Is it the Fengtian Monastery that Master Yuan resides in?"

"Yes."

"The Empress is going to see Master Yuan because of your situation?" He could not think of any other reason for the Empress to go to Fengtian Monastery at this critical juncture.

"Her Majesty did not inform me the reason as to why she is going out. I am not sure." *Despite the reason being extremely obvious.*

"You are lying." From her clear eyes, he could tell. "Do you think I am blind? Your expression is not one of confusion but one of

expectation.”

“Your Highness, did you just come from Ganlou Palace? It looks like you got quite a number of gifts.” She wanted to change the topic.

However, Prince Zhou grabbed onto her wrist and pulled her in another direction. “Follow me to Ganlou Palace! Imperial Father promised to marry you to me. He cannot go back on his words. I want to ask him clearly.”

She struggled. “Your Highness, don’t play around. Her Majesty has ordered me to go to Fengtian Monastery.”

He looked intensely at her. “Is it the Empress who wants you to go or are you the one who wants to go?”

“Her Majesty wants me to go and I also want to go.” *If she wanted him to give up, she had to be unshakable.*

“You really don’t want to be with me?” *No matter what he does?*

“Your Highness should already know how I feel.” *She has never done anything to let him misunderstand. Why won’t he let go of her?*

“It seems like Master Yuan is truly my predestined fate.” Prince Zhou laughed bitterly before turning to leave.

No wonder even the Crown Prince did not receive the Yellow Eel Inkstone, while he got three gifts. They had given him the shorter end of the stick and was asking him not to complain!

Fu Rou opened her mouth to speak before changing it to a sigh. She continued on her way to Lizheng Palace.

Everyone had things they would attain and things they would not attain. She could not force Prince Zhou to give up on her nor could she force herself to accept anyone else other than Sheng Chumu.

The Empress’ procession set off. It was only now that Lu Qi handed the route to Fengtian Monastery to Deputy General Caoyuan.

Caoyuan found it weird why he only got the route heading to the Monastery. Lu Qi expressed that the route back would naturally be given when they were heading back. Ever since Lu Qi took over General Fan to lead this trip, he had been acting arrogant. It made Caoyuan extremely displeased. The way Lu Qi was acting showed that Lu Qi did not trust him.

“I did not say that. It is just that with every one less person that knows, there is less of a chance of it being leaked out. No one would dare to make any mistakes with the safety of the Grand Emperor and Empress in their hands.” Lu Qi did not trust anyone.

Caoyuan snorted, “Then why did you give me the route to the Monastery? You might as well not have given it to me. After all, all I need to do is follow you.”

“That will not do. If you don’t know the route, how will you do your tasks? At every location, you have to send people to check out the place first. The Grand Emperor and Empress must be extremely comfortable for the entire journey.” He was the highest ranking military officer. *Of course he would have work for the men under him. How could they not do anything?*

“I am to do the trivial and troublesome things like checking the route out beforehand whereas you can just show your face beside Her Majesty’s carriage. General Lu, you really planned this out well.” Caoyuan was fuming.

Lu Qi was calm. “I am the lead and you are the assistant. We both have different things tasks. It is fair and reasonable.”

Caoyuan glared at Lu Qi as he kicked his horse and left.

Usually, they would request for the assistance of the local troops. However, Lu Qi was a bastard, with eyes on top of his head and did not discuss anything with Caoyuan. With Lu Yunji and Grand Prince Liang supporting him, Lu Qi was arrogant. There was no need for him to suck up to anyone and he was perfectly fine giving orders.

Meanwhile, Grand Prince Liang, who was in the same carriage as the Grand Emperor, had opinions as well.

“Imperial Father, I heard that the Empress is harboring a motive to go to Fengtian Monastery. The Empress wants Master Yuan to read Fu Siyan’s face and see who she should give Fu Siyan to. Imperial Father, if she wanted to give Fu Siyan to me, would she need to go through such a big round? She could have just said it directly. She must not want to let Fu Siyan marry me and purposely use Master Yuan to shut you up.”

The Grand Emperor closed his eyes to rest. “Did the internal attendant tell you that the Empress is going to Fengtian Monastery to conduct a ritual for your Fifth Brother?”

“They did say...” Grand Prince Liang did not think much of it. “But it is a small and trivial thing...”

The Grand Emperor’s eyes shot open in anger. “What did you say?”

Grand Prince Liang cowered. “I...I didn’t say anything.”

“It is your Fifth Brother’s death anniversary. Why does it sound like a trivial matter when you say it? Other than women, is there any other thing in your heart? Don’t you feel brotherhood?”

In the Grand Emperor’s life, he regretted allowing the relationship between him and his sons, as well as amongst themselves, to deteriorate the most.

“Imperial Father, I am at fault. I said the wrong thing, you should guide me. I am willing to let you scold and hit me. Please don’t ruin your health out of anger.” Grand Prince Liang quickly admitted his mistakes.

“It is not your fault. You were born late and did not even get a chance to see your Fifth Brother. What brotherhood could you possibly have? My Zhiyun has been intelligent since young. When he was young, he loved to hang out by my side and ask me to teach him how to shoot. Actually, he was not at all talented in archery but was much better at drawing. Before he turned ten, he could already draw beautiful pictures of skylarks. Everyone who saw his drawings could not help but praise him. During the final years of the Sui Dynasty, I was gathering an army to suppress the uprising. Because Zhiyun was

still young, I did not want him to suffer in the army. Therefore, I left him at my native town, Hedong. I never thought that the local government would covet riches and abduct him. They sent him to Yin Shishi. Yin Shishi lost to me on the battlefield and killed your Fifth Brother. My poor Zhiyun. At that time, he was only fourteen years old.”

Grand Prince Liang became aware. “So Fifth Brother was good at drawing skylarks. He is similar to me, I also love to draw. However, I am better at drawing eagles.”

Grand Emperor nodded. “You and your Fifth Brother are talented in drawing. If your Fifth Brother could live till your age, he would have similar eyes, nose and side profile as you do. When I see you, I often think of him.”

“No wonder you have always doted on me all these years. It is because I am standing in Fifth Brother’s spotlight. When I have children, me and my children will be filial to you on behalf of Fifth Brother. Speaking of which, in order to have children, I will have to have a woman that can bear me children, right?”

The Grand Emperor did not know whether to get angry or to laugh. “You will never change. You talk about women every few sentence.”

“I am worried that after Master Yuan reads Fu Siyan’s face, he will say that Fu Siyan cannot be with me. What will I do then? The Empress might be thinking of this and is going to leave me hanging.”

“Master Yuan is an old priest. His physiognomy is unique. He consults heaven and earth and must be revered. No one can change that.” The Grand Emperor was confident. “I even came over personally. The Empress will not dare to order Master Yuan to change the will of the heaven’s under my watch. Moreover, Master Yuan is famous and is unafraid of influential people. He treats gold as if it were the ground and he is not someone that the Empress can control.”

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Sheng Chujun was wearing a sour face as he looked at the Fuan Temple at the top of the mountain. It was as high as the heavens. The uncountable number of white gleaming stairs was making him dizzy.

It is all his Elder Brother's fault. He was always coming up with tricks and had spent the past few days sewing flowers. Their mother got frightened that Sheng Chumu was not thinking straight again and has been serving him carefully. When Elder Brother left the house, their mother had also kicked Sheng Chujun out and given him a difficult task. For every ten steps he took, he had to kowtow. He was to head to Fuan Temple to pray that Sheng Chumu will be able to marry the one he wants.

“For brotherhood...” He breathed in deeply as he rolled up his sleeves and climbed. “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten...*bow*...this year the worst thing to be is someone’s younger brother. Why shouldn't my brother be the one bowing and praying for me while I go out with girls? My mother is so biased.”

A fragrant wind blew past him as someone lightly bumped into him. After spending so much time amongst the flowers, he was particularly sensitive and immediately turned to look. *Oh, a pretty lady.* Deep black eyes, refined eyebrows and a white powdered face. It made one feel like squeezing her cheeks.

“Sorry.” The pretty lady was Sun Lingwei.

Ever since Chen Ji’s accident, she had wanted to ask her sister for forgiveness but her sister refused to meet her. She heard that praying at Fuan Temple was very effective and specially came here.

“It...it’s okay.” Sheng Chujun was suddenly filled with energy as he walked in synchrony with Sun Lingwei. With shoulders side by side, he kneeled, bowed and thanked the heavens for being fair.

“My surname is Sheng. I like to read, ride and shoot. I have yet to marry. What about you?”

“My mother said that I should not talk to strangers.” In the end, Sun Lingwei still glanced at him. His eyes were bright, his nose was high and when he smiled, his teeth shined in white. He was handsome.

“We even kowtowed together, how are we strangers? Who have you bowed sided by side before? There isn’t anyone, right? I am the only one, right? That proves that our relationship is not average.” Sheng Chujun’s greatest talent was smooth talking. It could even be considered the gift of gab.

“Who has a relationship with you? Rude.” Sun Lingwei laughed dryly. *The way he put it was new and interesting.*

“I was wrong. It is not a relationship, it is fate. Our fate is not ordinary. Hence, we are able to meet and kowtow together at the same place and time.” He managed to make her smile. *It was worth it.*

“Frivolous. I am not going to talk to you.” Sun Lingwei sped up.

“You can choose not to speak to me. You just have to listen to me...” Sheng Chujun followed tightly as he chirped on deviously, “...then I picked up my father’s famous large hatchet and chased away the two men that dared to make fun of the ladies. Tell me, don’t you think I stand up for justice? I really hate it when men bully women. There was another time when I was walking in Chang’an’s main street and saw a thief...”

Unknowingly, they had reached that seemingly high and unreachable

mountain top.

“You talk the entire way here. Aren’t you afraid that your mouth will dry up?” On the entire way, Sun Lingwei never looked at him straight in the face.

“You are so considerate. You worry that I get thirsty.” Sheng Chujun always found a way to draw their relationship closer.

“I am despising you for talking so much...” Her ankle suddenly twisted and he caught her.

“I wanted to ask you, what are you wishing for that you kowtow so sincerely the entire way?”

Women tend to say the opposite of how they feel. They complained that he talked too much but actually loved to hear him talk.

Sun Lingwei naturally did not wish to tell others.

“I know. You wish for a good marriage right? Oh my god, this Fuan Temple is too effective.” He was finally going to be blessed like his two older brothers.

“How do you know that it is effective?” Sun Lingwei did not understand.

“You came here to wish for marriage and met me as soon as you stepped on the stone stairs. Isn’t it effective? I am right in front of you.” *He was better than his Elder Brother and Second Brother. It was a marriage bestowed by heaven.*

“Nonsense. Who said that I am here to wish for marriage?” Sun Lingwei blushed.

“You are easily embarrassed. You are blushing just because of this?” He felt a tingle in his heart.

Sun Lingwei ignored Sheng Chujun and walked into the temple. She wanted to take a wishing charm. However, Fuan Temple only gave out a hundred pieces every day and the last piece had just been taken. Sheng Chujun did not care. However, as he saw Sun Lingwei

about to cry from disappointment, he went to pester the monks. Unfortunately, it was of no use. In the end, it was Sun Lingwei that had to ask Sheng Chujun to stop making things difficult for the monk.

Sheng Chujun thought about it. "Who cares about the wishing charm, I have..." He felt his inner pocket. "Oh! I have something here that is better than the wishing charm!" He took out Chuling's peace knot.

"This is called the Sheng Peace Knot. It can drive out evil spirits, protect and allow one's wishes to come true. It is very effective. It cannot be exchanged for any amount of money." Sheng Chujun saw that Sun Lingwei did not believe him. "I may do many kinds of evil deeds but I would never lie to a girl. Let me tell you, this is a secret skill passed down my Sheng family for generations. Do you know how my father, Sheng Xiaojing, gained the Emperor's high regard? Other than his ability to win battles, more importantly, it was this Sheng Peace Knot. In the past, he used this Sheng Peace Knot several times to guarantee the Emperor's safety. The Emperor was extremely pleased and conferred him the title of Duke Lu. Also, Princess Xinnan was sick last month. My brother sent her a Sheng Peace Knot and she immediately recovered. When it was Princess Xinnan's birthday, she did not ask for anything except to plead with my brother to give her a few Sheng Peace Knots."

Sun Lingwei's eyes lit up. "Are you speaking the truth?" She then thought, "If you have such a good thing, then why do you need to come to Fuan Temple?"

"I..." Sheng Chujun had to give an excuse. He could not expose his elder brother's secret. "...came to train. Climbing a mountain and kowtowing can train my legs and my waist. My amazing figure is all due to rigorous training."

"How about I buy one from you?" Sun Lingwei did not want to make a wasted trip.

"You can't. Because this thing can only be given to someone who is fated. We are fated so I will give it to you." Human relations were much better than money.

Sun Lingwei hesitated but eventually accepted it. She urgently

needed good fortune for her and her sister to make up.

“May I ask for your name?” Sheng Chujun took the opportunity.

Sun Lingwei was startled. “How can I tell others my name so easily?”

Sheng Chujun looked disappointed as he saw Sun Lingwei leave. *Ah, after so long, he even gave her a gift and yet he could not even get her name. He had failed miserably!*

Sun Lingwei suddenly turned back. “If my wish comes true, I will definitely return to repay the wish. I hope we will be fated to meet again.”

Sheng Chujun jumped up and waved enthusiastically. “Okay, we will meet again if we are fated!” *When it comes to fate, it is not a coincidence. Anyone with a will, will find a way.*

Sheng Chujun is also shameless like his brothers... Haha.

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Fengtian Monastery sat on top of the mountain and was surrounded by a mystical energy. Anyone who saw it from afar would have his spirits uplifted. However, Sheng Chumu was not interested in this place. The food was distasteful and he could not sleep here. He ate two meals in one but he was still so hungry he slouched awfully. He almost choked when he gobbled down his food and had to cough for a long while.

The reason why he was being treated so inhumanely was because the famous Master Yuan of Fengtian Monastery was a chess fanatic. Every time he mentioned playing chess, everyone would avoid him, afraid of being called on. Although Sheng Chumu knew he was a sacrificial lamb to play chess against Master Yuan, he had not imagined that the chess fanatic would be so crazy. He could not leave even if he lost and had to continue playing game after game. This was a test of his physical and mental strength.

However, Sheng Chumu would not back down. This game would help him to buy over Master Yuan.

Master Yuan was a famous chess fanatic and one of the things that Sheng Chumu learned from his uncle was chess. He had not thought much of it before but chess has become his key to win. He has played, and lost a total of one hundred and six rounds of chess without eating or sleeping. Master Yuan was not tired at all but was

impressed by Sheng Chumu's novel ways of thinking. Hence, he demanded that Sheng Chumu continue to play with him.

Regardless, this was the right way forward.

Sheng Chumu drank as he gobbled down his food. He had a lot of stress and he also had to make his next move.

Master Yuan frowned upon seeing the muddle-headed Sheng Chumu. He said, "Throughout my life, I have not been afraid of status and have regarded money as dung. I have lived till this day and the world is nothing but a passing breeze to me. However, for chess, I have put down my pride for you. I never imagined that you would trample upon my sincerity!"

Sheng Chumu laughed, "I just wanted to drink a few bottles of your superior wine. Don't be angry, once I return, I will send you a hundred and eighty bottles of superior wine."

"Who cares about those stinky bottles of wine? I waited a long while for you and even took out the chess board that the Emperor gave me. Do you know how much anticipation I had for our next round? You are so drunk, you can't even sit still. How are you going to play chess with me? Someone, take him to the well and splash him with cold water. Don't think that you can run just because you are drunk. I, Master Yuan, will not allow others to fool around!"

"Old man, what are you complaining about? Don't think that you are so good just because you have beaten me a hundred and seven times. Once I read through the Linglong Chess Book, I can beat you with my eyes closed." Sheng Chumu was speaking his mind as he was drunk.

"Young lad Sheng, what did you say? Linglong Chess Book?" Master Yuan's eyes widened.

"What?" Sheng Chumu spat and waved drunkenly. "No, no. I did not say that."

"I heard it clearly, Linglong Chess Book. You have this treasure with you?"

"No...nope." *He has caught the bait.*

“Aiya, we are the same, what is there for you to hide. The Linglong Chess Book is a sacred book for chess. In the past, I was willing to spend my money and riches to get it but I didn’t manage to. How did you obtain it? Can you lend it to me?”

“Do you want the Linglong Chess Book so much?” Sheng Chumu was going to pull the reel in.

“Yes.” Master Yuan nodded heavily.

“It is easy to get it. You can bet with me.” Sheng Chumu’s eyes narrowed. “We can play one round. If you lose, you grant me a favor. If you win, I will give you the Linglong Chess Book.” Sheng Chumu reached into his chest and placed a book on the table.

Master Yuan’s eyes hardened and he exclaimed, “Alright! I will make the bet!”

This round was different from previous ones. Sheng Chumu did his best and gradually began to gain an upper hand.

Sheng Chumu played his next move and smiled gleefully. He said, “Master Yuan, it is only natural that the waves behind Yangtze River would push the ones forward. I have cornered you with this move. There is no use even if you frown. Admit your loss!” *One should never underestimate their enemy.*

“Young lad Sheng, you are smart. You have learned many moves from me after a hundred and seven rounds. You even used some moves against me in this round. *This brat might still have a few tricks up his sleeve.*

“One is born with intelligence. I will have to thank my parents.” Sheng Chumu raised his eyebrows gleefully.

“However, intelligence can be beaten by intelligence too.” Master Yuan’s next move completely changed the circumstances of the board. There was no way for Sheng Chumu to regain the advantage.

Sheng Chumu blinked his eyes dumbfoundedly. “This is not possible!”

“Chess is a game of personal development. You only wanted to win and made aggressive moves. If you had not been so hasty to make that last move and carefully made your play, you might have been able to beat me. However, you were too hasty and tried to snatch the win. You forced me to exhaustion. It should be understood that Yin and Yang depend on each other as do life and death. This is the ultimate principle of heaven. You have lost this round.”

Master Yuan took the book and grinned. “This sacred chess book is mine to take.” Sheng Chumu wore a hard face but he laughed internally. *The old man had fallen for his trap.*

On this day, Empress Zhangsun arrived at Fengtian Monastery and immediately started a ritual.

Fu Rou took a walk alone during her free time, since she was feeling unsettled. She received the handkerchief that Sheng Chumu asked Consort Han to send, and understood the meaning of the stitches. She followed the Empress to Fengtian Monastery but did not know what Sheng Chumu was planning to do.

All of a sudden, someone yelled, “My robe! My pills! Destroyed! Destroyed! What is going on?”

Fu Rou turned towards the direction of the yell and saw a priest holding a red colored robe jumping up and down. Another disciple wore a humbled expression and seemed to be arguing with the priest. The priest was Sun Siyao and he specialized in alchemy. He was about to make another pill but as a very superstitious man, he would only wear blue robes. Who knew that the robe would turn red? Sun Siyao saw this as an inauspicious sign and did not know what to do.

The argument between the two became more heated and Fu Rou decided to step in. She asked, “Masters, did you all put any insect repellent items in the box you used to store these robes?”

“How did you know? This robe is even more valuable than my eyes. There are a lot of insects during the wet and cold season in the mountains. I am afraid that the insects would bite the robe and I

specially bought Wu Wei Leaves, an effective insect repellent a few months ago.” Sun Siyao was very agitated.

Fu Rou nodded and continued, “You must have placed quite a lot right?”

Priest Sun shook his head and denied, “Not a lot. It was only twelve bags.”

“Twelve bags...” *Is that not a lot?*

“The robe is very precious. As long as I can keep it in good condition, I am willing to spend as much as possible on the insect repellents. However, I did not expect it to change colour instead. Aiya, my robe... Master, I have disappointed you.”

Fu Rou explained, “This robe is dyed with woad blue dye. The Wu Wei Leaves you bought contains turmeric and purple essence. You placed a huge amount of it in the box for a long time. When the insect repellent came into contact with the woad blue dye, it would react and cause the colour to fade slowly. However, as long as we control the color contrast technique properly, this can be corrected.”

The pair of disciples stared blankly. Fu Rou laughed and explained, “I mean that it is easy to dye the robe back to its correct colour.”

Priest Sun jumped for joy.

Fu Rou obtained a few herb dyes from Sun Siyao and brought a cauldron of water to boil. She placed burnt herb dyes into the hot water and explained, “There are many similarities between dyes and alchemy. For instance, the Chinese nut-gall and the dried pagoda tree flower can both be dyes and medicinal ingredients. Just like how different medicinal ingredients can be transformed into different elixirs under the expert hands of an alchemist, different dye ingredients can be changed into different colours through careful manipulation and special techniques by a dyer. The wood in the box had allowed the purple essence in the Wu Wei Leaves to dissipate quicker.”

Priest Sun exclaimed in realization, “That is interesting.”

Fu Rou placed the robe into the water and allowed it to soak for a while. However, when she took the robe out, it was still red.

Priest Sun panicked and asked, "This...why is it still red?"

"It has to dry under the sun." Fu Rou confidently answered.

Priest Sun and the disciple wringed the robe dry of water and hung it out on a rack to dry. The sun rays shone on the robe and slowly dried the robe. At the same time, a mysterious thing happened, the red colour slowly turned blue.

Priest Sun exclaimed, "It has changed! It has really changed!" When he turned around to look, he wondered, "Hm, what happened to the lady from before?"

Fu Rou left once she helped the pair as she had to catch up to Empress Zhangsun.

The disciple was also puzzled and he said, "We were so focused on the robe, I didn't see where she went."

"We should thank her when we have the chance. Quickly quickly, I need to hurry along and get the fire started! Master, please bless me!" Priest Sun wore his robe and dashed into a room.

The next morning, Empress Zhangsun and the Imperial Emperor arrived and sat in their seats. Master Yuan was stifling a yawn, he had not slept well the previous night. First, the Empress Zhangsun had sent Wei Song to give greetings to him. Next, the Imperial Emperor sent someone else to threaten him. Master Yuan had dismissed him and he was only focused on his chess.

Empress Zhangsun raised her eyebrows and asked, "Master, did you have a good rest yesterday night?"

Master Yuan replied, "I did not sleep well last night. Grand Emperor and Empress, whose fate would you like me to look at?"

Empress Zhangsun answered, "I would like to seek your help with a female official under me, Fu Siyan."

“This is very interesting. Why are so many people interested in a female official’s fate reading?”

The Grand Emperor laughed, “Fu Siyan is no ordinary person. There are actually four men who asked for her hand in marriage. One of them is my son, Grand Prince Liang.”

The Empress also laughed, “The Emperor said that this matter is in my hands. However, I am troubled. I do not know who to bless with this marriage and hence, I can only seek your help.”

The internal attendant led Fu Rou into the hall.

Master Yuan looked at her and remarked, “No wonder there are four men chasing one lady. She is dignified and elegant. Who is interested in her?”

The Empress did not reply to his question directly but said, “Master, two amongst the four are officials and are not worth mentioning. Look at her features, fate and destiny. Is there a chance that she is qualified to marry Grand Prince Liang...or Prince Zhou?”

“I will do my best.” Master Yuan stroked his beard and instructed, “Fu Siyan, please take two steps towards me.”

Court Lady

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Fu Rou walked forward and maintained a calm expression although her eyes quavered with her worry. She did not know what method Chumu used to influence Master Yuan to help him.

“The sky is full, the people are clear, the beauty is here. Her appearance...” Master Yuan continued, “She is incredibly lucky.”

Grand Prince Liang roared with laughter. “It seems my taste in women is not bad.”

Empress Zhangsun continued to inquire, “How about her and Prince Zhou...”

Grand Emperor said, “Empress, why do you have to mention Prince Zhou? Fu Siyan is lucky and she should serve Grand Prince Liang. You have to give me some face and make me happy right?”

Fu Rou could no longer maintain calm as she turned around nervously to look at Empress Zhangsun. However, Master Yuan impatiently waved at her and said, “What are you all so anxious about? I am not done speaking. Her luck is in contrast and conflict between the two royal men.”

Grand Prince Liang frowned, “What are you talking about? Since she is lucky, why would there be conflict?”

“Fate would differ between each person. Just like water, if a fish was put in it, it would swim freely. But if you put a tiger in it, the tiger would drown. Fu Siyan is strongly affiliated to the element of water but Grand Prince Liang, as the Grand Emperor’s son, has a strong dragon energy around him and is therefore affiliated with fire. If the fire dragon meets water, it will not be a good thing.” Master Yuan shook his head.

The Grand Emperor did not give up. “What can be done if Grand Prince Liang wants her?”

“Both sides will meet with calamity.” Master Yuan’s words immediately changed the Grand Emperor’s attitude.

The Grand Emperor immediately opposed, “This cannot be. I am still waiting for grandchildren from Grand Prince Liang. Grand Prince Liang, let’s leave this matter as it is.”

On the other hand, Empress Zhangsun was beaming with joy but she asked, “Master, you mentioned both royalties. What about Prince Zhou?”

Master Yuan shook his head and explained, “As long as the man has dragon energy, he will not be suitable. Prince Zhou is also royalty and naturally will not be suited for her.”

Empress Zhangsun sighed, “Thank goodness we came or we would have committed a grave mistake. Fu Siyan, you may take your leave.”

Fu Rou slowly regained her calm expression and bowed to Master Yuan. “Thank you, Master Yuan.”

She walked out of the grand hall and heaved a sigh of relief before breaking out into a wide smile. Sheng Chumu was smart and quick thinking to take care of the incident. However, Fu Rou was still clueless as to what method he used to get the famous Master Yuan to do as he wanted.

“My lady, I have finally found you.” A priest caught up to her.

Fu Rou recalled, “You are the person from yesterday...”

The priest held a small bottle in his hands. "Senior Sun's robe really returned to its original colour after being dried in the sun. The pill he made is also complete. This pill is very useful and Senior put in a lot of effort into making ten pills. It can cure a hundred kinds of poisons and save lives. Senior named it Rival King Yama. Even if one is left with a single breath of life, this pill will be able to save the man from King Yama. Senior asked me to give you these two pills to repay your kindness."

Fu Rou shook her head. "How can I accept this?"

"This is a gift for you, hurry up and keep it. It is a blessing for you." The priest shoved the bottle into Fu Rou's hands and continued, "Senior Sun said that he had used up his lifeblood for this elixir and he would not practice alchemy anymore. The two pills in your hands are two lives. Hurry and accept it."

"Then... thank you, Priest." Fu Rou thought of Sheng Chumu. He was a general and he would be injured someday. She accepted the pills for him and replied, "I should personally go and thank Priest Sun for his generous gift."

"It is alright. Senior Sun needs to rest for more than ten days every time after he finishes practicing his alchemy." The priest bade farewell to Fu Rou and left.

At the grand hall, Empress Zhangsun stayed behind to talk to Master Yuan after everyone left.

"Can you take a look at my fortune?" Empress Zhangsun went straight to the point.

Master Yuan recovered from his mild surprise and laughed, "Your Majesty has the blessings of the heavens and will live to a thousand years."

Empress Zhangsun sighed, "Since I asked, I meant it with my heart. Master, you do not have to lie to me."

"Your Highness, life fortune telling is a big taboo among all taboos

and it would provoke the gods. If I speak boldly, it will not only be bad for me, it would also be bad for you.” *A long life may be filled with regrets but a short life could also be meaningful.*

“If I wasn’t rest assured, why would I ask this? At the end of the Sui Dynasty, life was in turmoil and people lived like pigs and dogs. Master, you must have personally witnessed that terrible side. Thankfully, His Majesty is wise and has brought peace to the world. To be honest, this is not a situation we can truly be happy with. Great Tang is most afraid of a large internal fight. Many things have happened with the Crown Prince this year and with my illness... I am afraid that if I am gone, the Crown Prince will not be as stable and careful as need be. If things change, the internal court will be in chaos and this would not be good for Great Tang.”

While Master Yuan was crazy over chess, he was very logical in all other matters. He answered, “I understand your worries.”

“Since you understand, tell me the truth. How long more do I have?”

“This...”

“You just have to nod or shake your head.

As she spoke, she reached her hand out and spread her five fingers only to see Master Yuan shake his head. She stretched out three fingers but Master Yuan shook his head again. Her expression darkened and she was about to hide another finger.

Master Yuan interrupted, “Your Majesty, you may not have more than three years. Don’t ask any further.”

“Not even three years?” Empress Zhangsun let out a long sigh upon seeing Master Yuan’s silence. She asked, “Is there nothing else I can do? Three and a half years would be good too.”

Master Yuan shook his head and remarked, “Heaven’s destiny can not be changed by ordinary men. However...”

Empress Zhangsun’s eyes brightened, “However?”

“Your Majesty must find someone by your side to help you in order

to prolong your life. For instance, Fu Siyan; she has a strong water affinity while Your Majesty has a wood affinity. Water can help wood. If she stays by Your Majesty's side, she can be of help." The heart of the mother of the lands was just any ordinary mother's heart.

Empress Zhangsun fell silent for a long while before she nodded.

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“Repeat what you said!” Fire was blazing in Sheng Chumu’s eyes as he wanted to burn a hole in this old face.

“I told the Empress that Fu Siyan will benefit her and suggested that she values Fu Siyan more.” Master Yuan was unperturbed. “The Empress is so worried, I could not bear it. Furthermore, I looked at Fu Siyan’s face. She can indeed help the Empress greatly. Moreover, you are so concerned about Fu Siyan, I suggested to the Empress to treat her better. Isn’t that perfect?”

“Perfect your head! I want to marry her but you asked the Empress to treat her better. If the Empress decides to keep Fu Rou by her side for life, are you going to marry me instead?”

This old priest had an abundance of failures but not a single success. He wasted half of the exceptional Chess Book to set up a trap and finally coaxed them to fall in. In the end, although Fu Rou was not given to Prince Zhou nor Grand Prince Liang, the Empress was also not willing to let her go. He did not gain anything from this.

Master Yuan chuckled, “If you don’t look down on my old age and stiff bones, I am willing to take responsibility for my mistake.”

“That’s enough! We had agreed that you would stop the Empress from giving Fu Siyan to Prince Zhou or Grand Prince Liang and make her realise that Fu Siyan should only be given to me. Only after you

did this then I would give you the entire edition of the Linglong Chess Book. Now that you have made things like this, I..." Sheng Chumu took out the Chess Book as he prepared to tear it. "...shall perish together with this!"

"Don't tear it!" Master Yuan stopped him. "I also tried my best. When I tried to bring up your name, I was immediately cut off. The Empress said not to mention anyone else other than the two royal princes. What was I to do? If I mention your name for no rhyme or reason and say that Fu Siyan is best matched with Sheng Chumu, won't they see through us? How would the Empress not suspect that something is fishy then? I have already tried my best. At least Fu Siyan was not given to Grand Prince Liang or Prince Zhou right? You have to give me the rest of the Linglong Chess Book."

Sheng Chumu snorted, "What can you do if I don't give it to you?"

"If you don't give it to me, I will go to see the Grand Emperor and the Empress right now. I will tell them that I read Fu Siyan's face wrongly and Fu Siyan would be a great match with Grand Prince Liang. They would be a heavenly pair and a great blessing to Great Tang's future." For the exceptional Linglong Chess Book, he had thrown caution to the wind.

"You are too despicable." The old priest had such a kind face. One really could not tell.

"In order to rescue the Linglong Chess Book from your evil clutches, I am willing to sacrifice myself and be despicable for once." Master Yuan extended his hand and raised his brows.

How could Sheng Chumu not have known the disadvantages of this plan. If he were to fall out with the old priest, he would lose his wife and army. He had no choice but to think of another plan.

Master Yuan took the other half of the Linglong Chess Book and hugged it to his chest as he walked away.

Sheng Chumu looked at the high walls of Fengtian Monastery. Similar to when in Chang'an, they were split by a tall wall, as if on two sides of a river. They were both at Fengtian Monastery, he just

needed to get over this tall wall and he would be able to see his Rou'er.

However, he could not meet her. His elder sister has said that Empress Zhangsun is extraordinary and has a nose as sensitive as a dog. If she suspects that Master Yuan had been bought over by Sheng Chumu, whatever he had done would have gone to waste. *For his beautiful future with Rou'er, he had to bear with it and wait for another opportunity. He has to create a plan that has no chance of failure so he could strike with one shot!*

In two short days, she was nervous when they arrived and calm when they left. Fu Rou waited beside the carriage as she gazed at Cangshan Mountain. She listened to the sound of the ancient bell ringing from Fengtian Monastery. She was happy. She did not know why but she felt like Sheng Chumu was beside her the entire time. She did not feel lonely.

Empress Zhangsun walked out. Before she got into the carriage, she suddenly smiled at Fu Rou. "Fu Siyan, sit in the carriage with me."

Fu Rou was slightly stunned. Under everyone's gaze, she boarded the Empress' carriage. Everyone knew that only people that the Empress trusted wholly would be allowed to sit in the same carriage as her.

The entourage set off, occupying a long stretch of road.

Empress Zhangsun broke the silence. "Four men were asking to marry one woman. Today, with a single sentence from Master Yuan, the issue has been resolved. Fu Siyan, how do you feel about the outcome?"

"Truth be told, I don't feel good." Fu Rou was bitter.

"Tell me why."

"It is my fate but I am not able to decide and can only wait for others to decide. I don't like this feeling." Fu Rou hesitated slightly, "I spoke carelessly, please forgive me Your Majesty."

“There is no crime. You are merely speaking the truth.” Empress Zhangsun sensed this from a long time ago. “Fu Siyan, do you want to leave the Royal Palace?”

“Yes.” She did not want to lie.

“You did not hesitate to answer.” Empress Zhangsun smiled.

“If I were to beat around the bush and speak secretively, it would be asking for trouble.” *There was no need to make things harder on herself.*

“You wish to leave the palace. Do you know what my wish is?”

“Could it be for Great Tang to have peace and prosperity?” Fu Rou guessed.

“No.” Empress Zhangsun shook her head. “My wish is for all my children to grow up safely and healthily. I want them to live until it is time for them to go peacefully. All mothers are willing to sacrifice their lives for their children. However, as you know, the majestic Royal Palace is filled with lonely souls wandering about every night.”

“That is why I wish to leave.” *She wants an ordinary family, to do normal things and live carefree days.*

“But I wish for you to stay a while more to help me.” Empress Zhangsun cared about what Master Yuan said. “Are you willing to?”

“If I may be so bold as to ask you something.”

Zhangsun permitted.

“If Master Yuan said only the first half of what he said and there was no latter half, would Your Majesty have given me to Grand Prince Liang?”

“If I were to say no, would you believe me?” Empress Zhangsun looked at Fu Rou. “Fu Siyan, do you resent me?”

“I do not dare to resent you.” *So she was prepared to sacrifice her.*

“You did not say that you don’t resent me but said that you did not

dare to resent me. I can see that you are angry inside. The power struggles in the Royal Palace is complicated. Whenever I make a decision, I have to consider the balance and there are many things that I feel helpless in. However, I have to admit that this time, I considered the Grand Emperor, Emperor, Grand Prince Liang and Prince Zhou. I did not consider your feelings. I have decided to make it up to you.” Empress Zhangsun took out a handkerchief and handed it to Fu Rou. “On this handkerchief, I wrote the word pardon. I am giving this to you. It can pardon the mistakes of a person once.”

“It can pardon any kind of mistake?” *This was surprising! Previously, there was the Life-saving pill and now there is a Death-relief handkerchief?*

“Are you thinking of it as a Danshu Iron Voucher [1]? This can only be used to pardon small mistakes. It will be useless against severe crimes. However, don’t look down on it. You are the only one who has ever received this from me.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Fu Rou accepted it. She could no longer pretend to be generous and reject gifts. Maybe one day, it could save a life.

“Be at ease and stay by my side. I won’t neglect you.” Seeing how she took it gracefully, Empress Zhangsun thought that Fu Rou had a clear view of things.

All of a sudden, the carriage jolted to a stop. Fu Rou hurriedly supported Empress Zhangsun before opening the curtains to look out. She could not help but be taken aback. A group of wild animals were dashing out of the forest.

Looking at the roaring black bears and wolves, Lu Qi first called for Caoyuan. After all, Caoyuan had been doing a recce of the road before they crossed it. He was in-charge of clearing the way. He then recalled that Caoyuan had sprained his leg at Fengtian Monastery the previous day. He cursed under his breath. The wild animals seemed to have gone crazy and Lu Qi did not dare to try to force their way through. He instructed the group to hide in a mountain pass. Who

would have known that as soon as they entered the mountain pass, they would find that it was packed with people.

“Hong Yide?” Upon seeing who it was, Lu Qi was extremely shocked. He thought that Hong Yide was in Guangzhou.

“That’s right!” Hong Yide sneered as he brandished his huge sword. “Lu Qi, I have been waiting for you here. You and your father are trash. Today, I will let Lu Yunji feel what it is like to lose a child!”

Lu Qi grabbed his sword and shouted at the guards behind him. “Protect the Grand Emperor and Her Majesty. Leave!”

Fu Rou heard him clearly and pulled open the carriage’s curtain. She realised that the carriage driver was nowhere to be found and hurriedly assisted the Empress off the carriage. Thereafter, she saw Grand Prince Liang leading a carriage with the Grand Emperor in it, preparing to leave. She immediately jumped out in front of them.

“Do you want to die!” Grand Prince Liang pulled on the reins.

“Bring Her Majesty with you.” She was not thinking about herself.

“The carriage will be too heavy to move quickly. Get lost!” Grand Prince Liang raised the reins.

“How can you leave the Empress behind in a time of danger? Moreover, she is your biological sister-in-law. Even if you manage to escape today, do you think the Emperor will forgive you? Let Her Majesty on!” Fu Rou lifted her head and spread out her arms.

“You!”

Grand Prince Liang did not complete his sentence before Grand Emperor interrupted, “Don’t delay any further! Quick, let the Empress on!”

Fu Rou helped Empress Zhangsun onto the carriage. Empress Zhangsun turned around and pulled Fu Rou on. The both of them entered the carriage.

Grand Prince Liang hollered and the carriage headed towards the

other end of the mountain pass, into another forest.

Hong Yide's real motive was to catch the Grand Emperor and Empress. As he saw them leave, he immediately ordered his men to give chase. Lu Qi wanted to stop them but was surrounded by Hong Yide and his men. He was dragged into a bitter fight.

Lu Qi was frustrated. That morning, they were supposed to wait for the army to gather before leaving. However, Grand Prince Liang was impatient, having lost his potential wife, and kept on rushing him. Lu Qi thought that he could show off his abilities and left half the army to pack up while he led the other half first. Now, Hong Yide had more men than him and they were all ready to fight to their deaths. He looked at their horses leaving without the men.

With Lu Qi distracted, his opponent managed to take the advantage and aimed their long sword at his ribs. When he found out, it was already too late.

Bam! Another sword slashed in, sending the long sword flying. A figure appeared behind him.

Lu Qi looked behind. "Sheng Chumu!" *He never thought that it would be him!*

Sheng Chumu did not look at him as his sword continued to slash. He was only concerned about one thing. "Where is Rou'er? Where is she?"

Lu Qi was disgruntled. "As soon as you open your mouth, you ask about your woman. Why don't you ask about the Empress?"

"She is most likely with the Empress. By asking about her, I am asking about the Empress." Sheng Chumu did not hesitate.

Lu Qi scoffed, "They have escaped."

Sheng Chumu asked, "Which direction did they go? I have to rescue them."

"Get through this obstacle in front of us first before talking." Lu Qi did not want to lose someone that could fight at this point in time.

With their backs against each other, they did not allow anyone to get through to them. Despite attacking for a long time, Hong Yide did not manage to succeed and the local army managed to send assistance. Seeing that he had lost his advantage in numbers, he waved and ordered for his men to retreat, abandoning those that had been captured. He led the remainder of his men into the forest.

Lu Qi noticed that Sheng Chumu was glaring at him. “What? Are you waiting for me to thank you?”

Sheng Chumu did not say a word as he lifted his leg and kicked Lu Qi.

Lu Qi fell onto the ground before hopping up. “You bastard...”

Sheng Chumu was fuming. “If not for you, this would not have happened today. You instigated Grand Prince Liang and bullied Rou’er, all to get back at me. I have been wanting to settle this score with you.”

“So what if it was me? You and Fu Rou have been hindering my family. Don’t think I’m unaware!” Lu Qi threw a punch.

The two men that had just fought back to back were now tangled in a fight.

1. Given in ancient times by Emperors to pardon his ministers of any crime.

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The light from the firestick was swallowed by the darkness. Amongst the cold and wet stone walls, the light barely illuminated the four figures. In order to lose their pursuers, they had abandoned their carriage and ran into the old forest. At the critical juncture, she found this cave and ran in without caring. Although they managed to lose their pursuers, they were currently lost in this deep cave with numerous forks. They could not find their way back.

The Grand Emperor believed that this was the Death Maze of the Cangshan Mountain.

The Cangshan Mountain had many caves and they were all linked. The route was, however, complicated like a huge maze. During the Sui Dynasty, when the citizens were being extorted, many chose to escape into the caves in the Cangshan Mountain to hide. Unfortunately, they often got lost in the caves and were trapped, eventually perishing from starvation or dehydration. Hence, the name Death Maze was formed.

Empress Zhangsun was very positive. At every fork, she used a copper coin to choose whether to head left or right and proceeded slowly.

However, after going through fork after fork, they reached a dead end and had to turn back to reselect. This journey was extremely

tiring, especially for the Grand Emperor, who was much older, and Empress Zhangsun, who was still slightly sick.

Fu Rou was smart and made markings along the way they had gone. It was not futile. Moreover, she had arranged the bones of those that died in the maze out of kindness and accidentally found a mechanism to open a hidden door.

Behind the hidden door, were two stone rooms. There was a simple stone bed, stone chair and some equipment. There were even some oil lamp flints. It was obvious that someone had lived here. Although this was not an exit, it allowed the four of them to have some rest.

Fu Rou then thought that if someone could live here, it meant that they probably figured out how to get through the maze. They might have even left a map in the stone rooms.

Empress Zhangsun and the Grand Emperor agreed with Fu Rou and started to search the entire place.

The Grand Emperor saw that Grand Prince Liang was not moving. “Grand Prince Liang, don’t just stand there. Help us search.”

Grand Prince Liang suddenly fell to the ground and did not get up. Everyone was frightened as they lifted him onto the stone bed. Fu Rou realised that he had a wound on his back and the wound was turning black.

Empress Zhangsun thought back. “He must have gotten hurt while fighting those evil men. I am afraid that their weapons may have been coated with poison...”

The Grand Emperor shook Grand Prince Liang. “Grand Prince Liang, wake up. You can’t abandon your father. Hurry and wake up!”

“Grand Emperor, do not be anxious. Grand Prince Liang is young and strong, he must have fainted temporarily. Let me see...” Empress Zhangsun reached out to touch Grand Prince Liang’s forehead. However, the Grand Emperor shoved her hand away.

“Get lost! You cannot touch him! You...you all are evil!” The Grand Emperor shouted.

Empress Zhangsun was stunned. "Grand Emperor..."

"Why can't you just let us go? My Jiancheng and my Yuanji were all killed by you people. That Emperor of yours knew that the Sui Officials were catching people and escaped in the night by himself. He left my fourteen year old son, Zhiyun in Hedong, causing him to be beheaded by Yin Shishi. I am already old and only have Grand Prince Liang left. Why can't you just let us go? You people have already gotten the throne and Great Tang. You have the whole world. Isn't that enough? Must you push me to the edge before you all are satisfied!" The Grand Emperor was losing reason as his eyes tinged red.

"Grand Emperor, you are getting confused. The one who escaped by himself in the night, leaving Fifth Brother at the old house in Hedong was not His Majesty. It was the Crown Prince Yin, Li Jiancheng." Empress Zhangsun did not want her husband to be misunderstood.

"Jiancheng?" The Grand Emperor's gaze slackened. "Right, my Jiancheng is dead as well. Even his children, my obedient grandchildren, are all dead. Emperor Qin, Li Shimin. You are despicable! I am your father and they were your biological brothers. They were also your niece and nephews! Emperor Qin! Emperor Qin! Emperor of Great Tang. You have killed so many of my children and grandchildren. Are you still trying to take Grand Prince Liang away? Good, good! I cannot bear this any longer. If it is not you that will be dying today, it will be me! I am going all out!"

The Grand Emperor suddenly pounced onto Empress Zhangsun and strangled her.

As Fu Rou saw this, she did not care anymore and picked up a pot and smashed it over the Grand Emperor's head. The Grand Emperor immediately lost consciousness.

"Your Majesty, are you alright?" Fu Rou was shocked. She never thought that the Grand Emperor would bear so much resentment against the Emperor. They were father and son.

"All these years, he had been burying the resentment in his heart. He hated the Emperor and he hated me. No matter how we tried to be

filial towards him, we can never make up for the things that happened on the day of the Xuanwu Gate Coup.” Empress Zhangsun looked about to cry. “It is clearly someone’s else that poisoned Grand Prince Liang, yet he blames it on me and the Emperor. He actually really, really hates...”

“Your Majesty, you are sweating.” The Royal Palace killed people and destroyed family relationships. Fu Rou sighed as she took out a handkerchief to help Empress Zhangsun wipe away her sweat. She accidentally touched a bottle of medicine. “Your Majesty, I have two medicinal pills here. It was given to me by Priest Sun from Fengtian Monastery. He said that it is an antidote. Perhaps it would help Grand Prince Liang.”

Empress Zhangsun looked at the medicine bottle and muttered, “Priest Sun from Fengtian Monastery? The one that people claim is a Pill God, Sun Siyao?”

Fu Rou made the decision. “I am going to feed Grand Prince Liang a pill and see.” She took out one pill and walked towards the stone bed.

Zhangsun suddenly grabbed onto Fu Rou’s wrist as she stared at the unconscious Grand Emperor. “Wait! Let...let me think...”

“Think about what?” Fu Rou asked.

“The Grand Emperor holds a murderous grudge...against the Emperor and me. He will never forget it and always uses different reasons to make things difficult for the Emperor and me...” Empress Zhangsun struggled with herself. “This is the Death Maze, no one knows...”

Fu Rou cut her off, “Grand Emperor was confused. Your Majesty is also getting confused.”

Fu Rou gently but firmly took Empress Zhangsun’s hand off as she walked to Grand Prince Liang and fed him a pill. Empress Zhangsun wore a complicated expression but did not say anything.

After a while, Fu Rou noticed that Grand Prince Liang’s complexion was improving and breathed a sigh of relief. Although Grand Prince Liang was not very decent, she did not want him to lose his life. This

concerned people's lives, and she could not go against her will.

The Grand Emperor slowly regained consciousness. Fu Rou did not hit him hard and it was his anxiety that knocked him out. Empress Zhangsun hesitated before going to help him. However, he pushed her away once again.

Fu Rou saw this and said calmly, "Grand Emperor, Grand Prince Liang has already taken a pill and is improving. His life is not in danger."

The Grand Emperor checked Grand Prince Han's wound and realised that it was fresh blood that was flowing from it. He was delighted. "Thank the heavens, thank the heavens."

Fu Rou continued, "It was thanks to Her Majesty's reminder that I remembered the two pills that were given by Priest Sun Siyao."

When used well, lies could help people.

The Grand Emperor froze as he turned to Empress Zhangsun angrily, "Just now, I..."

Zhangsun subconsciously touched her neck that still felt like it was being pressed on. "Just now, Grand Emperor was anxious about Grand Prince Liang's injury and accidentally knocked onto my neck."

The Grand Emperor reacted quickly. "Yes! I was...a little careless."

Grand Prince Liang opened his eyes and called out, "Imperial Father."

"Eh! I am here, I am here." In times of danger, a father and son were linked in their hearts and mind. All statuses were disregarded.

Empress Zhangsun walked into the other stone room and Fu Rou followed her. The two of them searched the entire room but did not find anything.

Empress Zhangsun suddenly said, "The four of us are trapped here. The Grand Emperor is old, Grand Prince Liang is injured and I am sickly. I need someone to support me just to walk. You are our only hope to get out of here." She took out a pearl hairpin from her hair.

“This is a night pearl given to me by His Majesty. Take it and find our way out.”

“I will heed your order.” Fu Rou knew that Empress Zhangsun was right. As she turned to leave, Zhangsun called for her.

“Fu Siyan.”

Fu Rou turned back, “Your Majesty, do you have any other instructions?”

“Did you know? Master Yuan said that you are someone that can help me.” Empress Zhangsun gazed at her. “I also believe that you can help me.”

Fu Rou nodded as she took the night pearl, a chunk of black ink slab and a piece of cloth that she tore from her clothes. She walked out of the stone room and into the never ending darkness.

Court Lady

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Hong Yide was wandering around the forest frantically. There was no one with him. They had all died from the arrows shot by the reinforcement army. He could no longer continue running as he leaned on a tree to catch his breath. However, he noticed someone walking out from behind the tree.

“Who is it?” He was startled.

“It’s me.” That person was calm and composed. His appearance was similar to Chen Ji but their demeanour was different and his eyes were cold.

“Fu Shui.” Hong Yide breathed a sigh of relief. “I should have listened to you. Now I am trying to escape.”

Fu Shui clapped and two figures appeared behind him. There was even a horse. “You are really stupid, but I won’t watch you die. Go, my men will protect you.”

Hong Yide was overjoyed. “You are loyal. I will repay you for this.”

Fu Shui smiled. “You will have the chance.”

Hong Yide got on the horse and galloped out of the forest. He startled Lu Qi, who was leading the manhunt.

“The rebel! Quickly kill him!” Lu Qi chased after him relentlessly.

After Lu Qi finished his fight with Sheng Chumu, he went to question those that they had captured. It was only then that he found out that Lu Hanxing hated him and had leaked his route to Hong Yide. He knew that he could not let Hong Yide escape alive. If not, the news on how he and his father had accepted Hong Yide’s bribe would leak out. When that happens, they won’t simply be eating prison food but their heads would roll.

Lu Qi’s gaze was menacing as he urged his horse and took out his bow. He aimed at the back of Hong Yide’s head.

Unexpectedly, an arrow brushed the side of his body.

He turned back. But before he could find out who shot at him, he was shocked to see a flurry of arrows aimed at him, causing him to break out in cold sweat. He narrowly managed to survive but got shot in the stomach, falling off his horse. He rolled down a slope and knocked into a stone. Before he lost consciousness, he suddenly realised that Hong Yide had an accomplice.

Meanwhile, the Emperor felt uneasy as he sat in Concubine Yan’s Palace.

Concubine Yan spoke warmly, “Your Majesty, please calm down. Both the Grand Emperor and Empress are blessed with good fortune. Nothing will happen to them.”

“This is all my fault. If I made the decision back then, to give Fu Siyan to Prince Zhou, the Empress would not have needed to go to Fengtian Monastery. This would not have happened.”

Concubine Yan felt even more apologetic. “Just because Prince Zhou wanted a palace lady, the Empress had to specially make the trip. I feel even more guilty.”

The Emperor recalled the promise he made to Concubine Yan and felt awkward. “My dear, I promised to fulfil Ge’er wish. I never thought...”

Concubine Yan cut him off. “Your Majesty, now the most important

thing is for the Empress and the rest to come back safely.”

“Yes, yes.” The Emperor suddenly asked, “Eh? Doesn’t Prince Zhou come over every night to accompany you to copy Buddhist teachings? Why do I not see him tonight?”

Concubine Yan’s attendant replied, “His Highness heard that the Empress met with trouble on their way back to Chang’an and was extremely anxious. He rode out of the palace immediately. He said that as the younger generation, he could not just sit and wait. He has headed to Cangshan Mountain to personally join the search.”

“This child is always so sincere. His personality is like mine, I like him.”

“The Crown Prince should be the one that is most similar to Your Majesty. The Crown Prince is composed and has your style.” Concubine Yan was not willing to let her son steal the limelight.

“Oh right, where is the Crown Prince? His mother has gone missing. Is he still in the Eastern Palace?” The Emperor sent people to the Eastern Palace to check.

The internal attendant came back to report that the Crown Prince was extremely anxious upon hearing that his mother had gone missing. He was currently offering incense and praying for the Empress to return safely.

The Emperor was unhappy. As a man, he only knew how to pray when things happened. Couldn’t he be like Prince Zhou and gone out personally to help and put in effort for his Elders? He was only proactive when it came to hunting.

As Concubine Yan heard the Emperor complain, she served him some warm tea. “Your Majesty, you cannot blame the Crown Prince. The Empress is his biological mother. The Crown Prince must be very worried. His biological mother has gotten into an accident and the Crown Prince is extremely frantic. It is understandable that he may make some mistakes.”

The Emperor shook his head. “In the future, he will have to rule

Great Tang. How can I rest assured if he makes mistakes easily?"

"Your Majesty is talking about the future ruler. I am timid and do not dare to say much. Please do not talk about this area of things with me in case other people were to misunderstand."

There were rules in the internal palace. They were not allowed to interfere in government affairs.

"Concubine Yan, you are very good. You know how to avoid the topic. I should not bring it up."

Without knowing how much control the Empress had, Concubine Yan and her son had to tread carefully. Concubine Yan was neither proud nor impatient. "Your Majesty, please have tea."

Fu Rou fell onto the ground as the night pearl rolled away.

She could not go any further, she had no more strength. The cave looked like a mouth gushing with blood, ready to swallow her at any moment. She thought of her parents, elder sister, second brother and younger sister. Ever since they came to Chang'an, they spent very few days together, making her miss the days back in Guangzhou very often. In her memory, even Third Madam was cute and slightly petty. It was really happy to have the family so close and always interacting. She then thought of Chumu, who made her happy as well.

She closed her eyes and felt as if a soft breeze was blowing against her face. She smiled slightly, "Chumu ah, Chumu. Ever since meeting you, my entire life has changed. Because of you, I entered Han Mansion and then the Royal Palace. Now, I am the Empress' Siyan. Although it has been difficult, the days have been exciting. Regardless of how this ends, I will always be thankful for you. You are like a warm breeze that blew into my life....breeze?"

Fu Rou's eyes shot open. *There's wind! If there's wind, there must be an exit!*

Her desire to live suppressed everything else she was feeling as she

straightened herself and picked up the night pearl. She started walking once again. Very soon, she saw light shining in. She excitedly pulled apart the vines that were blocking the light. The harsh sunlight shone into her face, making it hard for her to open her eyes.

When her eyes adjusted to the light, she calmed down. She assessed her surroundings and realised that this exit was different from the one they had entered.

However, before she could truly bask in happiness, a tiger walked out from amidst the grass. She felt as if her soul left her in fright. She did not even realise that she had dropped the map as she only thought of escaping from the tiger. Even her newfound energy depleted and she fell to the ground once more. No matter how she tried, she could not pull herself up. She heard the low growl of the tiger as it neared her. Her consciousness started to flicker.

In her heart, she was screaming for Sheng Chumu!

As if her cry has been heard, a pair of male boots appeared in the distance. The miserable growl of the tiger was heard next before silence fell over the area once again.

She faintly knew that the man had helped her get rid of the wild animal and wanted to take a look. However, she felt her whole body being lifted into the air when the man picked her up. Then, she lost consciousness.

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Sheng Chumu was extremely frustrated. They had scanned through the entire place and only managed to find the Grand Emperor's broken carriage and Lu Qi who had busted his head on a stone. He could not find Fu Rou anywhere.

He knew that Fu Rou was smart and would not panic. However, as the sky darkened, he could not stop his imagination from running wild. *What if Fu Rou had fainted from hunger or thirst or met with a wild animal or fell down a cliff...*

“General, we found something!” A soldier started waving a piece of cloth in front of him.

Sheng Chumu's heart was palpitating but his legs did not hesitate. He was the first to rush towards the soldier and found that the cloth was made of the material used in the Royal Palace. The black dots and lines drawn on it were very familiar.

Rou'er! He was confident that she was the one that drew this.

“This is a map. It records many paths but it does not look like a mountain pass...” Sheng Chumu spoke and suddenly exclaimed, “Could this be within the cave? Search this area immediately, take note of any cave openings!”

Very soon, someone found a cave opening. Sheng Chumu rushed in

front of the cave. Wind was blowing into the cave and the flame that they were holding barely lit the place up. However, he walked in fearlessly. He was holding the map that Fu Rou had personally drawn and Fu Rou had never made a mistake before.

Sheng Chumu brought some men into the cave. They walked for a very long time and were amazed at Fu Rou's brilliance. The map was detailed and accurate. If not for the map, they would have gotten lost a long time ago.

"This is the starting point of the map." He hit the stonewall and shouted, "Rou...Grand Emperor! Your Majesty!"

Very soon, they received a reply.

Sheng Chumu looked at the small dot on the map, it was different from all the other symbols. Very soon, he found the mechanism to open the door to the stone rooms. He immediately saw Empress Zhangsun, Grand Emperor and Grand Prince Liang.

Empress Zhangsun was extremely weak. "You are finally here."

Sheng Chumu greeted, "Sheng Chumu here. Greetings Grand Emperor, Your Majesty and Grand Prince Liang..."

Grand Prince Liang ignored him as he rushed to ask the soldiers for something to eat.

Empress Zhangsun spoke, "General Sheng, you saved our lives. When we return to Chang'an, I will definitely get His Majesty to reward you."

Sheng Chumu scanned the surroundings and did not see Fu Rou. "I heard that Fu Siyan escaped along with Your Majesty, why...are there only three people?"

Empress Zhangsun froze. "Eh, Fu Siyan went to find the exit. I thought she brought you all in here. Why? Didn't you see her outside?"

Sheng Chumu's heart sank as he held up the map. "We found this outside the cave but did not see Fu Siyan."

Empress Zhangsun looked at it. "That's right. This is the cloth that I gave Fu Siyan, but why is she missing?"

Sheng Chumu grabbed his fist and bowed. "I am not capable enough, I will continue to look for Fu Siyan."

Empress Zhangsun muttered, "Fu Siyan saved me, Grand Emperor and Grand Prince Liang. Now that she has gone missing, I cannot rest assured. General Sheng, I am counting on you. No matter how much you have to do, you must definitely bring her back safely. I will handle His Majesty. You will not be considered to have failed your duty."

"Yes, Your Majesty. I will not let you down." Sheng Chumu turned and left.

He was already planning to flip the entire Cangshan Mountain with or without the Empress' permission. Failed to do his duty? He didn't care about any of them. There was nothing more important Fu Rou in this world.

The smell of fragrant rice woke Fu Rou up. She opened her eyes and assessed her surroundings. She saw a wooden table, wooden chairs, and everything made of wood. A simple and realistic feeling rose in her. Birds were chirping outside and the sound of a spatula hitting a wok could be heard. Every sound seemed to remind her of Taoyuan. She breathed out comfortably. All of a sudden, wet stone walls, scary white bones and dark human hearts seemed to flood her mind.

Grrrr. Her stomach rumbled. She got up and walked to the neighbouring house. Her footsteps halted beside the door.

It was a simple kitchen with a blazing fire as the steam floated out of the iron wok. The spatula was handled expertly, frying vegetables. Green, yellow, red and green. The colours looked appetising.

However, what made her stop was the man cooking. His back was towards her. He had broad shoulders, muscular arms and was so tall, he looked as if he would break the roof. Who would have expected

such a heavenly man to stay in such a simple house and be cooking vegetables.

“Yan Zifang.” She called out his name lightly, seemingly in a sigh.

Yan Zifang froze but did not turn back. “Wait a while. The food is almost ready.”

“Her Majesty and the rest...”

“Sheng Chumu took your map and saved them.”

“Thank the heavens.”

“If you are thanking this heavens, why are you not thanking me?”

“Thank you?”

“Who did you think rescued you from the tiger’s mouth?”

“Thank you.” She was a reasonable person.

“There is no need to thank me. It is natural for a man to save his own wife.” *He was someone that was difficult to please.*

Yan Zifang scooped the vegetables onto a wooden plate and got ready the bowls of rice. He walked to Fu Rou and prepared the table. Fu Rou was starving and did not stand on courtesy. She sat across Yan Zifang and asked him why he was at Cangshan Mountain.

“Hong Yide was the one who attacked your entourage. I recognised him.” Yan Zifang used his chopsticks to pick up a few vegetables for her. “When he entered Chang’an, I saw him by accident. I have been suspicious of what he is planning.”

“Since you already knew, why didn’t you report him?” *If they had been prepared, there wouldn’t be so many deaths and they would not have encountered such a disturbing situation.*

“It is not my place so I did not do anything.” Yan Zifang did not think anything was wrong. “Moreover, I was just curious and asked people to watch them. I did not know that Hong Yide was planning to attack

your entourage.”

“It is not my entourage. It is the Empress’ entourage.”

“That’s right. The Empress has such a high status. Her movements are not something someone with my status can find out.”

“Perhaps you did not know who they were planning to attack, but you should not have kept silent. Even if it were carriages belonging to citizens, how could you just watch and not do anything?”

“Rou’er, why does it seem like everything I do is wrong in your eyes?” Yan Zifang suddenly placed down his chopsticks and took out the Longevity Pendant. He slammed it down on the table. “Or is it to say that you have degraded me so much that everything I do is wrong. Don’t you feel guilty loving Sheng Chumu?”

“This has nothing to do with you and me. I don’t agree with your actions. You clearly knew someone might get hurt, yet you simply stood by and watched. It is not the behaviour of someone upright.” Fu Rou’s eyes were clear. “As for the Longevity Pendant, it is a promise between our parents. At that time, we were both still very young and did not know any better. I treated you as family. I will never forget the snowy day when you were chased out of my family. However, you vanished since then, leaving only news of your death. In a blink of an eye, over ten years has passed. I have never forgotten you, but not as a fiancé. I think of you as an elder brother that doted on me. Moreover, ever since the moment Sheng Chumu fell from the tree, I have let go of you.”

Yan Zifang remained silent for a long while before standing up. “The food is getting cold. Hurry up and eat.”

Fu Rou looked as Yan Zifang walked out. She could not resist asking, “My clothes...”

“I was the one that helped you change.” Yan Zifang did not turn back. “The handkerchief and bottle that you were carrying are all placed beside the bed. You can check it later.”

Yan Zifang walked out of the room, his hands in fists. He released a

long breath. This was the first time Fu Rou told him how she felt. She was very honest but it also hurt him. While he was struggling not to drown and when he had fought to get out of his predicament as a pirate, he had always wished to grow old together with her. He only managed to survive for so long because of this goal.

She said that she had already let go of him. Then what about him? How could he let go of the longing he had all these years?

Empress Zhangsun arrived back at the Royal Palace. The Emperor came out to greet her and everyone was celebrating. The Crown Prince, Prince Han and the young Prince Qin surrounded Empress Zhangsun. They were all extremely emotional.

Empress Zhangsun wanted to bow to greet the Emperor but he quickly supported her and held her hand. They walked through the palace gates. Only after the Emperor and Empress walked past did the various concubines rise from their kneeling position.

Concubine Xi laughed, “Her Majesty must be confused from being too exhausted. She forgot to ask us to rise.”

Concubine Zhen glanced at Concubine Yan. “Sister Xi, you must be joking. If other people are confused it might be okay, but how can the Empress be confused? I think Her Majesty just wants to make it a point to some people that as long as she is still the Empress, they better follow the rules and not have any wild thoughts.”

Concubine Yan was calm. “Sister Zhen, you are becoming more incredible. You even know what Her Majesty is thinking. Hopefully Her Majesty also knows how you feel and encourages His Majesty to go to your place more often. I heard it has been three months since His Majesty went to your place. I feel anxious for you.”

Concubine Zhen’s face was sour and departed.

Everyone dispersed leaving Yu He to accompany Concubine Yan back to her palace. A palace maid served a bowl of ginseng soup.

Concubine Yan shook her head. “Take it away. I don’t have an

appetite.”

Yu He coaxed her, “Your Highness, you have to take care of your health.”

Concubine Yan changed her mind as she took the ginseng soup and slowly drank it. “In the past, my Imperial Father told me something. He said when people fight against one another, they are merely fighting to see who can live the longest. When all your enemies are dead and you are the only one alive, you are the biggest winner.”

Yu He lowered his eyes. “The previous Emperor has always been wise.”

“Hence, I have to take care of my body.” Concubine Yan gracefully took her last sip of the ginseng soup.

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It was such a foggy night that it was difficult to see one's hand when it was stretched out. The outline of the Cangshan Mountain was even darker than the night sky. Sheng Chumu did not know where he was nor how long he had been searching.

Ka-- it was the sound of a twig breaking. He didn't even blink as he stuck his sword out behind him.

In the midst of finding Fu Rou, he was extremely focused. His sense of sight and sound was at its peak sensitivity, as if he was a black panther. Therefore, he knew that there was someone behind him.

That person was skilled and reacted fast. After avoiding his sword, they could even retaliate. However, that person would never expect Sheng Chumu's actions to be quick and violent. Sheng Chumu abandoned his sword and pounced on the person.

"It's you?" After seeing who it was, Sheng Chumu froze. "Prince Zhou!"

Prince Zhou grabbed a hold of Sheng Chumu's collar. "You are of a lower status than I. How dare you attack me?"

Sheng Chumu pursed his lips before grabbing Prince Zhou's collar. "It is so dark, how would I know that it is you! Moreover, the Cangshan Mountain has been sealed. Other than the reinforcement army, only

the rebels are left. What are you doing here?"

"Fu Rou has gone missing. I am here to look for her." Prince Zhou was furious. "Stop pressing on me, let me get up."

"I must let you steal my wife but I cannot hold you down?" *It will be best if he could squash him to death.*

"I told you to get up. Did you hear me? How dare you squash a prince? Are you trying to rebel?"

Sheng Chumu flipped over to the side as he got up. "I am not afraid of you. However, Fu Rou is more important now. Return back from where you came."

"If I ask you to leave, will you go?" Prince Zhou got up nimbly.

"I won't." Sheng Chumu shrugged. "But you are not me and you have nothing to do with Fu Rou. Fu Rou and I like each other."

Prince Zhou snorted as he turned and walked in another direction. Very soon, he realised that Sheng Chumu was following him.

"Why are you following me?" Prince Zhou got irritated as soon as he saw him.

"Searching together with you." Sheng Chumu was not irritated and fitted well. "Your Highness, please do not misunderstand. I am not protecting you, I am guarding against you."

"Why are you guarding against me?" Prince Zhou could not react in time.

"This is the wilderness. Neither heaven nor earth will respond. Fu Rou is defenseless and alone. If you find her, who knows what will happen." Sheng Chumu looked at him as if he was looking at a pervert. "I have to find her with you."

"Ridiculous!" Prince Zhou could not be bothered to reply to him as he continued forward.

Sheng Chumu did not follow him closely but simply went in the same

direction. He had been searching by himself for a long time but had not been lucky. If Prince Zhou was lucky, he did not mind making use of him. All of a sudden, he saw Prince Zhou bend over to pick something up. He immediately took big steps towards Prince Zhou.

“This looks like...” Prince Zhou flipped it over.

Sheng Chumu was delighted. “This is a torn piece of the uniform palace ladies wear!” Alas, he had truly jumped onto Prince Zhou’s luck. His eyes narrowed. “There are blood stains...”

Prince Zhou bent down as he shifted away the fallen leaves. “There is an imprint of a tiger’s foot. There have always been ferocious animals moving about in the Cangshan Mountain. When the Empress’ entourage got into the accident, there was a fire in the forest. The soldiers were also looking around. All these would enrage the animals and make it more likely for them to attack people.”

“Rou’er is very smart, she would be able to tame a tiger.” Sheng Chumu loudly dismissed him. “Don’t jinx it. She must have hidden well and is waiting for me to rescue her!” He took out his sword and slashed wildly through the grass. Anyone could tell that he was venting.

“Sheng Chumu, don’t lie to yourself. A tiger’s print, bloodstained clothes. You have personally seen this. Even if you searched the entire Cangshan Mountain, what can you do?” Prince Zhou really did not understand what was great about Sheng Chumu. He was brave but not intelligent. He was hardly proper.

Sheng Chumu bellowed, “That’s right. I want to search the entire Cangshan Mountain!” He started to climb up the steepest slope. He must not have searched wide enough. Fu Rou might have fallen somewhere and could not shout for help.

Prince Zhou shouted as well, “What are you looking for? Are you looking for Fu Siyan’s bones? I am afraid that it will be in the tiger’s stomach. Sheng Chumu! Stop right there!”

Sheng Chumu pointed his sword at Prince Zhou. “I said that you are not allowed to jinx her!”

Prince Zhou snorted, “If you weren’t the guy that Fu Rou cared about, I could not be bothered with you. Do you think I am not feeling terrible?”

“You are feeling terrible but here--” Sheng Chumu turned back sharply and jabbed his own heart. “My heart is broken, it is torn. Do you understand? It is so painful, I’d rather not live! Death would be easier than this! However, if she is alive, I want to see her. If she is dead, I must see her corpse. I have to find her! If she is alive, I will take her away. If she is dead, I will not leave Cangshan Mountain alive! If you want to give up, you can go!”

Prince Zhou was extremely shocked. He looked at Sheng Chumu cut his way through the forest. In this almost vertical forest, he had formed a new path and was gradually climbing.

Duke Chen Residence.

Fu Yin was helping to wipe Lu Qi’s face. Lu Qi was still unconscious. She felt that the water was slightly cold and instructed the new servant, Mo Li, to add more hot water. She cleaned his face with great care.

“Luckily Elder Brother has you to take care of him. It seems like you have fallen for him.” Lu Yingying walked in.

Ever since Lu Qi was sent back, he had been unconscious. The physician had diagnosed that there was a blood clot in his brain. As to whether he would awaken, they could only use medicine and depend on heaven’s will.

Fu Yin paused. *Fallen for him? For Lu Qi? No, that can't be. She did this all to gain his trust and use him for her own revenge.*

“How is Elder Brother?” Lu Yingying took the medicine spoon and fed Lu Qi.

“Mmhm...” Fu Yin stopped spacing out. “Same old. His eyelids did not even move.”

Lu Yingying was worried. "Even the famous Imperial Physician Zhang could not do anything?"

Fu Yin shook her head. "He said the same thing as all the other physicians. He only changed the prescription."

Lu Yingying finished feeding her brother the medicine before instructing Fu Yin. "I have an old ginseng. I asked the physician and he said that it will not clash with the medicine Elder Brother is having now. Come with me to get it."

Fu Yin followed obediently.

Lu Yingying got more and more worried. "I can't just wait. Chang'an is so big and is the gathering place of people from foreign lands. Isn't there any other way?"

Fu Yin suddenly recalled, "I heard that in Guangzhou's Fan Square, there is a pharmacy that carries an unusual medicine. It is able to improve blood circulation and resolve blood clots. It is called the Zhenzhu Life-saving Pill. I am not sure if it is sold in Chang'an."

Lu Yingying's eyes lit up. "I will think of a way to find it. Help me take care of my Elder Brother."

Fu Yin took the ginseng and instructed Mo Li to make the ginseng soup. She headed back to Lu Qi's room but saw Lu Hanxing standing in front of Lu Qi's bed with a pillow. His eyes were cold as he stared at Lu Qi.

"What are you doing?"

She gave herself to Lu Qi to take revenge for her mother. Yet, Lu Hanxing was still alive.

"What can I be doing? I am here to see my brother and help him place another pillow."

Lu Hanxing stuffed the pillow under Lu Qi's head before cursing Fu Yin for watching Lu Qi so closely. He did not have a chance to get rid of Lu Qi. Hong Yide, that bastard had promised to not let Lu Qi come back alive. In the end, Lu Qi was still breathing.

Fu Yin walked over and took out the pillow. "Imperial Physician Zhang said the pillow cannot be too high."

"Okay, if you say it can't be stacked then it can't be stacked." Lu Hanxing pretended to be nice on the surface. "Yin'er, I really cannot tell. In the beginning, when you first entered Duke Chen Residence, you were honest, shy and cute. Now, as soon as you are agitated, you become like a female tiger."

Fu Yin maintained a stone face. "I haven't forgotten how Ling Long died. All the more, I will not forget what you did to me. Young Master needs his peace and quiet. If you have nothing else, please leave."

Lu Hanxing snorted before leaving.

As Fu Yin looked at the pillow in her hands, she felt that Lu Hanxing was evil. Lu Qi usually shouted and ordered Lu Hanxing. Lu Hanxing would always try to avoid him whenever possible. But now he had come and pretended to show good intentions. Something was fishy.

She sat on the couch. "Lu Qi, hurry and wake up. I am afraid of Lu Hanxing. I am very afraid. He does not seem to harbour good intentions. Only you are able to keep him in control."

Lu Qi did not react at all.

Fu Yin sighed and held onto his hand. She lay her head beside him as if that is the only way for her to calm her uneasiness.

Lu Hanxing walked through the corridor as he spat, "Peh, she is just a servant that has been in bed with Lu Qi before. How dare she be pretentious? When Lu Qi dies and I inherit the Duke Chen's title, I will make you regret it thoroughly."

The Housekeeper walked out from the courtyard and came up to him to congratulate him.

Lu Hanxing froze. "What is there to congratulate?"

The Housekeeper said that someone had come from the Zhao Residence and was currently discussing when Lu Hanxing and the

Zhao family's daughter's marriage should take place. They wanted to bring good luck to Lu Qi.

Lu Hanxing's eyes bulged out. "What? They want to use me to bring good luck?!"

Court Lady

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Fu Rou had been locked up for an entire day. She had tried to leave but Yan Zifang had locked the windows. She could not open it no matter how she tried. Now, she was stomping on the floor of the house, thinking whether it was possible to dig a hole and escape.

All of a sudden, the sound of the lock being unlocked could be heard. She ran back to the table to take a seat.

Yan Zifang walked in carrying meat and vegetables. Fu Rou asked, "How long are you going to keep me locked up?"

Yan Zifang placed the meat and vegetables into the kitchen. He then walked out to set up the bowls and chopsticks on the table. "I thought you were no longer talking to me."

Fu Rou's expression was bland. "I thought I made myself clear."

"Even if I released you, you can only return to the Royal Palace." Yan Zifang looked at Fu Rou. "Could it be that you prefer to stay in that hellish place? Don't forget that Grand Prince Liang is a prince. The Empress will not offend anyone for your sake. There is no one on your side."

"I don't like the Royal Palace, but..." Fu Rou paused.

"But you don't like staying with me even more because you are not

the same Fu Rou as back then.” *It was only his unrequited longing.*

“We are not enemies nor nemesis. There is no need to speak harshly to one another.” She just wished that he could let it go.

“I remember when we were young...you always carried this Longevity Pendant with you. You treated it as if it were your baby. You were willing to share everything with me except this Longevity Pendant. You did not even allow me to touch it. You said that this was left for you by your grandfather. However, on the night that your mother chased me out of the Fu Residence, you ran in front of me, crying and asking me not to leave. You gave the Longevity Pendant to me. This was the warmest thing I have held. When I was shot by Lu Yunji’s men and fell into the river, the river was icy cold. Only the palm of my hand remained warm because I was holding your Longevity Pendant. Even if I die, I will not let go of it.”

“Fu Rou, you don’t know how I managed to survive all these years. On the ocean, where storms could happen at any time, I was surrounded by pirates who killed without blinking. As a young brother, I had to worry that any of my older brothers would kill me when they did not like me. When I became the leader, I had to guard against any ambitious subordinates who could stab me in the back. All these years, I did not dare to come on land, I did not dare to meet you. I did not know how pretty you would have grown up to become. I did not know anything. However, one thing I knew was that I had a wife-to-be that I had yet to marry. At the end of the ocean, there would be a woman waiting for me on land. When I found out that you liked Sheng Chumu, you would never be able to understand how I felt.” *To her, it was the past. However, to him, it was like yesterday, today and the following day.*

Fu Rou fell silent for a while before saying, “Sorry.”

Yan Zifang laughed bitterly, “You don’t have to apologise because I don’t accept this fate. You are my wife and nobody can change that.”

Fu Rou was impatient. “You are being unreasonable.”

“Yes, I am unreasonable.” Yan Zifang held tightly onto the Longevity Pendant. “On the day that you placed this in my hand, I gained the

right to be unreasonable!”

Fu Rou suddenly reached out to snatch the Longevity Pendant. Yan Zifang was not willing to let go. She was annoyed and scratched his face, causing a line of blood to form.

Yan Zifang touched his wound and looked at the fresh blood on his fingertips. “Rou’er, are you really this cruel?”

Fu Rou forced herself to be firm. “Feelings cannot be forced. I feel guilty towards you but I cannot force myself.”

“I gave up the ocean and came onboard to land. I bear with the attitudes people in Chang’an gave me all because of what you said. Now, you are telling me not to force it. I am sorry, Fu Rou. This time, I cannot listen to you.”

Yan Zifang took big strides out and locked the room.

Fu Rou sat in the house alone for an unknown amount of time. Her emotions were all over the place. The memories from her childhood replayed itself in her head. It made her sigh and grieve. However, there was nothing she could do.

Dum dum dum!

Fu Rou pulled herself back to reality as she saw a shadow reflected on her window. Soon after, a hole appeared in the window.

Yan Zifang was completely drunk. He thought about it and decided that he could not give up so easily this time. He returned to the wooden house. He wanted to tell Fu Rou that he was sincere.

The room was pitched black. His legs were unsteady and he fell to the ground. All of a sudden, a delicate hand stretched out in front of him.

“Rou’er?” He hesitated before reaching his own hand out. He felt the warmth of the other person transfer to him through his palm. He was delighted and immediately scooped the other person up in his arms.

The faint moonlight could not illuminate the small room. He could only see a head of black hair, falling like a waterfall, buried in his arms. He was overjoyed and was extremely gentle as he placed a kiss on her head. He walked towards the wooden bed.

“I swear that I will not let you down.”

He lay over her, kissing her hair gently before moving to her face and finally her lips. He hugged her tightly as if he wanted to merge together with her.

After that emotional night, he had a good dreamless sleep. The sunlight lit up the place. Yan Zifang opened his eyes. As he saw someone with black hair sleeping beside him, he blissfully let out a breath. He pushed her hair away and saw her features clearly. Then, he jumped out of the bed in shock.

“Lu Yingying?!” He did not know what was happening. “Yesterday night...it was you?”

Lu Yingying blushed but maintained a smile. “It was me.”

She had originally wanted to ask him about the Zhenzhu Life-saving Pill but saw that he left his residence alone. She then followed him up the mountain out of curiosity and found Fu Rou, who had been locked up. Therefore, she freed Fu Rou and wanted to take the opportunity for herself.

Yan Zifang was in disbelief. “You are a noble lady. Do you know what are the consequences of such an unscrupulous act?”

Lu Yingying did not reply. Instead, she grabbed Yan Zifang’s hand and looked at him earnestly. “Can we be husband and wife just for a day?”

Yan Zifang shook his head and wanted to pry her hands off him. Her charming skin and their intimacy last night flashed through his mind and his actions became a lot gentler. He took his hand back.

“You were my first man.” Lu Yingying lifted the quilt and started to wear her clothes. “How about me? Am I your first woman?”

Yan Zifang turned over and spoke coldly, "Lu Yunji's daughter should never be my first woman."

"Do you still remember the song I sang at the beach? A twilight over the ocean, birds chase the day as it ends. Tears fall like pearls into my open hand, but Yingying will not regret. You appeared before me then and asked who was so cruel as to make me cry? You also asked me why I was so infatuated." *That look had determined her life.*

"If I could do it again, I would never have bothered you." *At that moment, he had gone there to kill her.*

"You regret it but I don't. I am Lu Yingying. Yingying will never regret. I wanted to be your wife for one day as a memory. But since you dislike me so much, then forget it. I won't force you." If he was going to toss her away even after the previous night, then she could not humiliate herself anymore.

Yan Zifang watched her walk out and suddenly said, "I thought you came to exchange yourself for the Zhenzhu Life-saving Pill." He did not know why but he saw himself in Lu Yingying. It turned out the devotion he had towards Fu Rou was actually so irritating.

Lu Yingying turned back and looked at Fang Ziyang in shock.

"Lu Qi is severely injured. There is a blood clot in his brain and he is unconscious. It is not a big secret. I have always paid attention to any information on Duke Chen Residence." *It is to ensure that he would be able to take revenge at any time.*

Lu Yingying's eyes shone with delight. "Do you really have the Zhenshu Life-saving Pill?"

Yan Zifang took out a medicine bottle from his gown and placed it on the table. "Lu Qi's life is not worth anything in my eyes. However, I will not take advantage of girls. Take this bottle and we will not owe each other for what happened last night. In the future, we do not know each other."

"You are using a bottle of medicine to ask me to forget the first man in my life?" Lu Yingying stared at Yan Zifang, her eyes were pained.

“If you do not accept it, you can throw the medicine away. But if you use it, it means you agreed.” Yan Zifang walked out. “Take one pill a day with warm water.”

Lu Yingying chased after him. “Yan Zifang, if I weren’t Lu Yingying and Lu Yunji’s daughter, would you still dislike me? Would I have a place in your heart?”

“There is no point in this question.” She was born to be the Lu family’s daughter and he was born as the Yan family’s son.

“No, there is. As long as you give me a confirmative answer, I can give up being Lu Yingying and Lu Yunji’s daughter. My father has a son. Without me, Duke Chen Residence will still be passed on. I can follow you to travel the world or even sail forever. As long as you take me with you, I will always follow you to the ends of the earth. Yan Zifang, can you forget your vengeance and take me away to find better and happier days?”

“If I killed your father and brother, would you be able to let go of your vengeance and spend the rest of your days with me?”

Lu Yingying was stunned as she shook her head. “You won’t. You are upright...”

“But it was your father that killed my parents and caused me to have no choice but to become a pirate and carry an infamous title. Every time I see you, I will think of the injustice my father felt and my mother’s blood. You ask me to let go, but have you put yourself in my shoes?!”

Yan Zifang stormed out, breaking the door.

Lu Yingying bit hard on her lip. She knew he was right. It was easier said than done to eliminate the hatred that he had for them for exterminating his entire family. She walked to the table slowly and picked up the medicine bottle with trembling hands. Tears rolled down her face.

Aaaaaaaiiiii. Oh Yingying. Is it worth it?

I guess to her, it's worth it.

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Mystic rays of light shone through the forest, touching each leaf and lifting up a small cloud of dust. Sheng Chumu did not care about this beautiful scenery. He had tripped over the roots of a large tree and did not even have the strength to lift himself up as he lay against the branches and panted. Prince Zhou was long gone and Sheng Chumu could not be bothered to figure out whether he had gone to find Fu Rou or if he had returned to the palace.

“Rou’er, are you angry at me? I am so useless, I could not protect you. If I had known this, I would not have allowed you to enter the palace. Even if I had disobeyed the Emperor and received a death order, I would have done it. I have let you down. Rou’er, is your soul still in this large mountain? Come out, let me see you. I can’t bare to lose you, I can’t bare this...” Sheng Chumu muttered to himself, his heart clenching up with pain.

A small, blur figure appeared in front of him. Like the fairy of the forest, the figure walked towards him.

“Rou’er?” *Haha, he must be dog-tired and was daydreaming.*

“Chumu.” The figure kneeled before him and caressed his face with her hand. She asked, “Have you been looking for me? It has been tough on you.”

“This is nothing. Rest assured, I will definitely find you! Even if this

is a dream and I do not have my five senses, my Rou'er is different from others. Your hand is so comforting and so warm."

Fu Rou laughed, "This is not..."

Before she finished, Sheng Chumu pulled her in an embrace. She jumped in shock but upon seeing that he had his eyes shut out of exhaustion, she lay still.

Sheng Chumu suddenly opened his eyes and grabbed Fu Rou's arms. He stared directly into her eyes and drew closer and closer until their noses touched.

"Rou'er, it really is you!" *This is not a dream!*

"You are alive!" *It's not a ghost!*

Fu Rou laughed, "Of course I am alive."

Sheng Chumu jumped forward and kissed Fu Rou's face. His excitement, happiness, relief could clearly be seen. He asked, "But I clearly saw blood and a tiger's print all over your clothes...how did you manage to survive?"

"I..." She had promised Lu Yingying that she would not involve her. Fang Ziyang also did not have malicious intentions. She replied, "I lost my way in the mountains and met a herbalist family. They were very kind and offered me a change of clothes. The female official's clothes I had were dirty and full of holes so I took it off and dumped it somewhere. I do not know anything about the blood marks on my clothes."

Sheng Chumu had a few suspicions but since Fu Rou was safe and sound, he did not care about anything else. "Good, as long as you are alive!"

At that point, shouts from the army troops could be heard. They were searching all over the mountain. Without thinking twice, Fu Rou jumped up with glee. "This is great. They are here for us."

Sheng Chumu immediately pulled her back. "Rou'er."

Fu Rou lowered her head to look at him and saw his stern expression. She understood his intention.

“As long as you don’t get discovered, they will think that you died from a mountain beast attack. This is the only way for you to leave the palace. If we leave together, we can become the Cowherd boy and Weaver girl.”

However, Fu Rou was rational and she objected, “We cannot leave everything behind. It would be too unfair.”

“We’re being unfair?” He had lived lawfully. For her, he had suppressed his true playful self. He questioned, “We are so in love, why must we be separated by a damn wall? Why can’t you decide your own marriage? Why must you marry whoever the Empress tells you to? In their eyes, you are just a tool for their balance of power. We are not being fair? Is the Emperor fair? Is the Empress fair? Is the world fair? Fu Rou, come with me.”

“Chumu, my parents are old. We do not know whether Brother Tao is alive or dead, and Sister Yin is also missing. I cannot abandon everyone.”

“I understand. It is not that fairness is unfair to you. I am just not as important as I think I am in your eyes. I will not send you off if you want to return to that cage.” Sheng Chumu struggled to lift himself up before he started walking off in the opposite direction.

Fu Rou stared in the direction of the army. Her mind told her she was right, but her heart was screaming to her that Sheng Chumu was right. Her chance of freedom was being torn away from her and she absolutely detested having her destiny decided by someone else.

Fu Rou whipped around and ran in the direction Sheng Chumu took off to, but she could not find him. Anxiousness flooded her head and she turned around desperately. Suddenly, someone hugged her from behind.

“Chumu.” Her eyes reddened as she cried, “I almost couldn’t find you! Why didn’t you wait for me!”

His voice warmly passed through her ears. He chuckled sincerely, “Dummy, I was always by your side. I have never left you.”

On this day, the Emperor praised Sheng Chumu generously in court. Although Sheng Chumu was absent, the Emperor promised to reward him in front of the court officials.

Sheng Xiaojing could recently hold his head high because of his son. On the other hand, Lu Yunji wore a black face. Lu Qi had been in charge of the Empress’ journey but because of the big incident, he had to be investigated. However, in the middle of the investigation, Grand Prince Liang came with an edict from the Grand Emperor who acknowledged Lu Qi’s loyalty in fending off the rebel troops and allowing the Grand Emperor and Empress to escape.

Grand Prince Liang not only had the Grand Emperor’s decree, he also brought two troops of General Cao Yuan forward. They testified that Cao Yuan was not happy with Lu Qi and was negligent in reporting the situation to Lu Qi, hence, placing the blame entirely on Cao Yuan.

Sheng Xiaojing pointed out a suspicious point. The enemy had set up an ambush early and it was evident that someone had leaked information to them, Lu Qi was still at fault. However, Grand Prince Liang still accused Cao Yuan of leaking the information.

In the end, the Emperor decided to assign someone to investigate the case due to its sheer scale. The Crown Prince volunteered to take the case on but the Emperor placed it in the hands of Prince Zhou instead. He also assigned Grand Prince Liang to the case on account of the fact that Grand Prince Liang managed to capture Cao Yuan.

After the court, Sheng Xiaojing shook his head and frowned at the sight of Lu Yunji and Grand Prince Liang whispering to each other as they left.

“Father.” Sheng Chuling had waited a whole morning for Sheng Xiaojing. He informed, “I have searched the entire area but did not manage to find Elder Brother.”

"Prince Zhou found clothing belonging to Fu Siyan, it is more or less confirmed that she met with misfortune. They called back the army and stopped the search. Your Elder Brother must not have given up yet."

"Would Elder Brother have done the unthinkable?"

Sheng Xiaojing cut him off and snapped, "Keep quiet. Don't say such inauspicious things. I will secretly send men to search for them. Don't alert the rest, especially your mother."

Ever since Chumu brought fame for the Sheng family, he has also brought more worry. *Sigh, there were always misfortunes in fortune.*

Who would have thought that Sheng Chumu had eloped with his lover? They went to a city near the sea in Guangzhou and were blissful.

Fu Rou did not completely enjoy this freedom and frowned when she heard Sheng Chumu ordering a few dishes from a restaurant. Freedom came with a price. The two were penniless.

"We don't need all this. Give us two bowls of noodles." Fu Rou reached for her wallet and sighed.

Along the way to Guangzhou, Sheng Chumu had spent as he wanted. Fu Rou's words of persuasion were useless against him.

Sheng Chumu yelled, "How can we just eat plain noodles? At the very least there should be fish and meat right? I am holding myself back and saving."

The waiter was impatient and he could see their distress.

Although Sheng Chumu could see Fu Rou's skinny wallet, he raised his head high and demanded additional ingredients along with their mains.

Once the waiter left, Fu Rou slapped the wallet in Sheng Chumu's hands and chastised, "Take a look for yourself. How are we going to pay up when we finish? I told you already, times are different now. You refuse to listen."

Sheng Chumu confidently reassured her. “Relax, Rou’er. I will definitely not allow you to suffer any hardship. I am smart, strong and handsome. How can I be short of money?”

Fu Rou rolled her eyes and said, “I really don’t know if you have any plans of sacrificing your pride.”

Sheng Chumu laughed, “Rou’er, you really know how to joke around.”

“Otherwise, how are you going to pay?” Fu Rou felt that this was harder than her palace duties. Their wallets were empty and they were trying to eat a meal without paying.

“I am so handsome and strong, I can work for them to settle it.” Sheng Chumu had thought this through. “With me around, who wouldn’t eat at this restaurant? The boss is getting a discount already!”

Fu Rou stared at him speechlessly. *Was there anyone besides Sheng Chumu who had such thick skin? To not pay after he eats.*

However, Sheng Chumu actually managed to curry some favor because of his looks. After finishing the meal, he got along well with the boss so much so that they became buddies. He managed to get a job working for the boss.

Fu Rou did not say anything but waited at the tea house opposite to the restaurant. The boss had agreed for three days but she guessed that he would not last more than two hours.

As expected, after an hour or so, Sheng Chumu walked out of the restaurant. His gloomy face immediately turned to smiles when he saw Fu Rou and he quickened his pace.

“Rou’er, there is good news!”

“Let me guess, the boss said that you do not need to work for him to repay that meal?” In simpler terms, Sheng Chumu had been chased out of the restaurant.

“Rou’er, you are so smart.” Sheng Chumu grinned from ear to ear.

“How am I smart? The boss is the one who is smart. If he allows you to work, he will have to close his shop.”

Fu Rou cocked her head to one side and observed guests running out of the restaurant. Some of their eyes were swollen, some had red noses, some were limping. The boss chased after them frantically as he begged them. It was a pitiful sight!

“He can’t blame me! Those people poked at my eyes and nose and said that I looked like a general instead of a worker. I praised their good foresight and they started to create trouble as they disturbed me further. They even wanted me to lower my head and bow to them. How could I withstand that ill treatment from those imbeciles?”

Fu Rou laughed, “I should just work for an embroidery house.” A young master who grew up with a silver spoon had given everything up to be with her. She would never get angry at him.

Sheng Chumu disagreed, “No way. How can I, Sheng Chumu, allow my lover to work hard on the streets?” He suddenly exclaimed, “I might not be able to use my good looks, but I can use my hands and feet. The wild animals on the mountains are enough to last us a lifetime.”

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In the evening, the pair's meal really improved greatly. The campfire burned viciously as it cooked the dead rabbit that was held over it.

Sheng Chumu gleefully tore off a rabbit's leg and gave it to Fu Rou. As she took a bite, her eyes lit up with delight.

Sheng Chumu's eyes curved into a smile and he wiped Fu Rou's lips sweetly. He said, "You can rest assured if you are with me. Even if we are a thousand miles from our hometown and hiding our true identities, I promise I will give you a good life." As long as he could bring happiness to his lover, he would be a hero.

"Hunting wild animals can fill us but where are we going to live?" They could not live without a roof over their heads.

"That is easy, I can hunt a few more tomorrow and sell them in the city. With the money, we can stay at an inn." All of a sudden, Sheng Chumu whipped his head around and became alert. His expression was cold as he questioned, "Who is it?"

The underbrush moved and a skinny old man dressed in rags led a tiny young girl out. She pointed towards the rabbit meat the two were enjoying.

Fu Rou immediately understood. She waved, beckoning the young girl forward, and offered. "Don't be afraid, come and sit with us."

The old man was hesitating but the young girl immediately darted towards Fu Rou. She snatched the rabbit meat and started to eat.

Once the rabbit had been devoured, the four of them started to become more friendly towards each other.

The old man explained that he lived in Lion Mountain. However, the arrival of a few bandits meant that the farmers could no longer survive. On a good year, the bandits would steal the food from the families, not even sparing the ducks and chickens. Unfortunately, on a bad year, the bandits would take the women. The young girl's mother was taken away by the bandits.

Fu Rou's heart clenched with pain as she listened. She braided the girl's hair and asked her for her name. The young girl played with her braids and ran into the field. She plucked a flower and shyly gave it to Fu Rou.

The old man explained, "My granddaughter was born mute."

Fu Rou was puzzled and she asked, "Old man, did the government just ignore the bandit problem in your village?"

"It was no use. One time, a few thousand troops came to eradicate the bandits from the village. While they said they succeeded and returned to the city, the bandits were still around. After the incident, the bandits started to steal more than ever before." The old man shook his head. His wrinkled face showed the pain and agony he had suffered.

Sheng Chumu understood this issue especially well. He added, "Some troops are afraid of fighting to their deaths. They randomly brandish their swords at the scene and return to the court to report. They use the opportunity to raise their ranks. A bunch of useless troops! If I had two thousand men on horses, I would..."

He suddenly felt Fu Rou's gaze on him and immediately shut his mouth. That was right, he had already made the choice to abandon everything.

The old man did not suspect anything and continued, "The present

times are definitely more stable than the chaos before. Even if we struggle to get food everyday, we can still survive. In the past, starved corpses could be seen everywhere. However, men can never be happy and we will always be hopeful. The war has ended. If there was another hero like Sheng Xiaojing who can defeat all evil and bandits, life would be so much better.”

Sheng Chumu could not help but blurt, “You know Sheng Xiaojing?”

“Who wouldn’t know Sheng Xiaojing? It is said that the bad guys will become out of breath from a shout and a wave of the axe of Sheng Xiaojing.” The old man revealed in marvel.

Sheng Chumu proudly laughed, “Right right! That is what I heard of too!”

The old man laughed bitterly, “However, it is said that he became court official and he no longer battles. Otherwise, why didn’t he go to our Lion Mountain and help us fight away the bad guys?”

Sheng Chumu defended his father. “Sheng Xiaojing is also human. He has aged and is old now, he should have the time to retire and enjoy, right?”

“Right, right. When we grow old, the only thing we wish for is for our children to be happy. If our children laugh and play, that is our happiness. Sheng Xiaojing is a hero, he should have his own happiness. Unlike me, my wife and children were taken by the bandits. My stupid son disappeared after he refused to give up fighting for them. I am the only one left, an old, white-haired man. What is the point of living? However, I cannot die, I still have my granddaughter. I am old enough and I do not care for myself but I just hope and pray that my granddaughter can have a better life.”

Sheng Chumu stared at the old man and felt overwhelmed. It was like he was staring at his father. Although Sheng Xiaojing had not said anything, when Sheng Chumu returned home alive, he had fainted from the bulk of emotions he felt. Sheng Chumu sighed as he wondered if his father was worried for him.

Fu Rou silently stared at Sheng Chumu, not saying anything.

The next morning, the old man and his granddaughter continued on their journey to find his son and his daughter-in-law. The young girl gave Fu Rou a flower and waved goodbye to her before leaving.

Sheng Chumu also sent them off.

Fu Rou stared at him. She knew that he did not have a good rest at night as he was calling for his father in his sleep. The old man had made him think of his father as well. Fu Rou also missed her parents.

“Chumu, let’s go back.” She felt guilty by leaving without bidding farewell. *With a guilty heart, how much further could they go?*

“No!” Sheng Chumu turned around sharply. With stern eyes, he stubbornly said, “It was so difficult for us to reach this point. I must not give up. You cannot give up too!”

At Duke Chen Residence, bright lights lit up the front doors and congratulatory words were pasted on the walls.

Lu Yingying sat by a window alone, eavesdropping on the conversations of passers-by outside. Lu Hanxing was getting married and the residence was very busy that day. However, her brother was still unconscious and there was no knowing when he would wake up.

Fu Yin entered the room and bowed towards Lu Yingying politely. Lu Yingying forced a smile and asked, “Is Elder Brother doing better?”

“I did according to what you said and fed him a pill each day but he does not appear to be doing any better. However, Imperial Physician Zhang said that the blood clot in Young Master’s brain is dispersing and as long as we persevere, there will be hope...” Fu Yin suddenly stopped and hesitated for a while before continuing, “Actually, I would like to ask Young Miss who gave you that Zhenzhu Life-saving Pill?”

A suspicious glare crossed Lu Yingying’s eyes and she bit her lip. “Why are you asking me this suddenly?”

“There is only one pill left. If you could get another bottle, or tell me

where to find it, I can go...”

Lu Yingying maintained a meek smile on her face but she wanted to cry. She said, “Another bottle? It is a pity but what I used to exchange for this bottle Zhenshu Life-saving Pill could only be used once. There is no second chance.”

Fu Yin jumped with shock and apologised, “It is my fault. It must not have been easy to obtain such precious medicine. I have troubled you.”

“You did not say anything wrong. I am useless and I cannot help much.” Lu Yingying knew that she should give up soon. *He was a person who was not even willing to smile at her and someone who exchanged a bottle of medicine for her most valuable thing. Why should she sacrifice herself?*

“You have become skinnier recently.” Fu Yin carefully asked, “Is there something on your mind?”

“My heart is no longer around. What can I have in mind?” Lu Yingying spoke without thinking but suddenly observed Fu Yin’s shocked expression. She said, “I have been feeling down ever since Elder Brother met with his incident. I must have spoken out of place. Yin’er, please take care of Elder Brother.”

Fu Yin was worried about Lu Yingying. However, she forgot about Lu Yingying when she returned to Lu Qi’s room.

She held his hand strongly and cried, “It is all my fault. It is all my fault that you are like this. From the day I first met you, I did not like you. I cursed at you because you are Lu Yunji’s son and you are the cousin of Lu Hanxing, who caused my mother’s death. I have been lying to you although you took such great care at me. It is my fault, I should not have cursed you. I don’t want you to die. Open your eyes and look at me, please? I beg you, don’t punish me like that.”

She suddenly felt a force gripping her hand. She sat up with a bolt and saw Lu Qi holding her hand. Her happiness overflowed instantly.

Lu Qi opened his eyes and stared at Fu Yin.

Fu Yin thought he heard whatever she said and her heart raced.

“Yin’er...” Lu Qi reached out a hand and held her face. He asked, “Why have you become skinnier?”

Fu Yin heaved a sigh of relief but her vision suddenly turned blur and she fainted.

Lu Yunji immediately called for Imperial Physician Zhang when he heard that his son had regained consciousness. However, Lu Qi desperately asked Imperial Physician Zhang to look at Fu Yin.

Imperial Physician Zhang carefully took Fu Yin’s hand and measured a pulse. He smiled, “Congratulations, congratulations! This young lady serves you right? She is pregnant!”

Lu Yunji burst out with laughter. “Great! Great! My son is awake and I will be getting a grandchild soon! Hanxing’s marriage has been followed by better and better things!”

A few servants carried Fu Yin back to her room. Imperial Physician Zhang prescribed her some medication and left Lu Yunji and Lu Qi in the room.

Lu Qi stiffened and revealed, “Father, it was Lu Hanxing who revealed the path we were taking to Hong Yide. He wanted to kill me.”

Lu Yunji was shocked. Hatred slowly filled his eyes and his expression darkened.

Court Lady

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Lu Hanxing was seized by Housekeeper Wu and the house guards as they pushed him into Lu Qi's room. He rolled his shoulders, not caring about his clothes getting dirty.

Lu Yunji snorted. Lu Hanxing looked up to see that Lu Qi was already sitting up and couldn't help but be surprised. How was Lu Qi awake? Even after eating the Zhenzhu Life-saving Pill, he did not seem to improve. Lu Hanxing had thought that the heavens were on his side and was waiting for Lu Qi to pass on. He never thought that Lu Qi would survive this crisis.

"Lu Qi, you...you are awake?" He suddenly felt as if the sky was covered in black clouds.

Lu Qi looked at him coldly, "Are you very surprised to see me awake?"

"Of course I am surprised! I'm delightfully surprised!" Lu Hanxing looked at Lu Yunji. "Congratulations, Uncle. Lu Qi has finally awoken. The heavens are shining down on him! As long as Lu Qi is fine, I would be willing to pay the price of marriage..."

Lu Yunji slapped Lu Hanxing, causing his face to swell. Lu Hanxing fell to the ground and immediately crawled up. He knew what was happening yet he pretended to be innocent and called out, "Uncle."

"You are right, the heavens have eyes and did not let you cause my son to die! Lu Hanxing, to think I treated you as if you were my biological son. I have raised an ingrate!" Lu Yunji fumed.

"Lu Hanxing, when did you start colluding with Hong Yide?" Lu Qi questioned.

"Hong Yide?" Lu Hanxing continued to pretend. "I did not! Someone must have set me up! I don't know anyone named Hong Yide!"

"Things have already turned out like this and you are still trying to deny? Lu Qi heard Hong Yide say that he was helping you to silence Lu Qi so you can take our Lu family's fortune. You leaked out the return route and arranged with Hong Yide to not let Lu Qi come back alive. You are vicious! Guards, bring me my weapon, I want to tear out this ingrate's heart. I want to see if it has already rotten!"

"Uncle! Uncle, please have mercy! I...I was deceived by the enemy and was foolish for a moment. Lu Qi, dear cousin. You know me. I am born stupid and rash. Please help me to plead for mercy." Lu Hanxing knelt in front of Lu Qi's bed.

"If I weren't so lucky, you would have succeeded." Moreover, he left such a mess for him to clean up. If not for Grand Prince Liang, he would have woken up in prison.

"I was in the wrong! I was in the wrong!" Slaps resounded as Lu Hanxing slapped his own mouth.

Housekeeper Wu came to report that Lu Hanxing's mother had arrived. It was his wedding day and Lu Yunji had arranged for people to invite her to attend the ceremony.

Lu Hanxing saw hope. "Uncle, please let me go on account of my mother. You promised my mother to take care of me. Please forgive me this time, I will serve you wholeheartedly! I will marry the Zhao family's daughter and help you with anything in the future!" As he shouted, he inched his way to the door. "Mother! Mother! Hurry and come and save me!"

"Second Sister-in-law is deeply respected, yet she gave birth to a

useless child like you.” Lu Yunji threw Housekeeper Wu a look. “Shut him up and send him to the rear courtyard. No one is allowed to let this matter spread. Second Old Madam must not find out about this.”

Fu Yin rested for a while. However, she was worried about Lu Qi and personally made and delivered medicine to him. Unexpectedly, she heard him shout.

“What nonsense letter?!”

Fu Yin jumped and quickly entered. She saw a man, dressed in military uniform, greeting Lu Qi respectfully.

“What is the point of telling me now that Hong Yide disappeared from Guangzhou? He has long arrived in Chang’an and almost took my life on Cangshan Mountain!” Lu Qi’s eyes were raging.

“I searched Guangzhou for a long time but did not find anything. I then followed the information we got from the men we captured and searched the mountains near the city for a long while. However, we still did not find anything. Since Old General Lu trusted me and entrusted such a huge responsibility, I was determined to find Hong Yide. That’s why I increased the area which we were searching...”

That man’s voice caused Fu Yin’s hand to tremble. The bowl hit the plate. This voice was clearly--

That man turned around. As soon as he saw Fu Yin, he looked like he had seen a ghost.

Lu Qi called out, “Xi Tao, where are you looking?”

Xi Tao was Fu Tao.

Fu Tao stammered, “I...I...” *Why was his sister here?*

“Ah, are you in a daze? Isn’t she pretty? You can’t look even if she is pretty. Let me tell you, she is my concubine and you are not allowed to interfere.” Lu Qi glanced at Fu Yin and became unhappy. “Fu Yin, why are you also just standing there?”

“Ah?” Fu Yin chuckled dryly as she quickly walked forward and placed down the medicine bowl. “What concubine are you talking about?”

“You are carrying my child, I have to give you a title. In a few days, when I recover, I will promote you according to the rules.” Lu Qi stared at Fu Yin’s back before looking at Fu Tao once more.

Fu Tao could sense Lu Qi’s gaze and did not dare to look at Fu Yin anymore.

Fu Yin accidentally knocked the medicine bowl over and exclaimed. She anxiously left the room. “I will make another bowl.”

“Silly girl, you must be too happy to say anything. I like how silly you are.” Lu Qi was in a great mood. “Xi Tao ah, you should be punished for failing in your task. However, there are two simultaneous happy events that happened today and I shall forgive you this time. Hurry and leave, don’t spoil my good mood.”

Fu Tao bowed quickly and left. The two of them walked one after the other into a small courtyard and Fu Yin closed the door carefully.

“Third Brother...” She had so many things to say but did not know where to begin.

“Why are you...” Fu Tao grabbed onto Fu Yin’s elbow. He felt as if smoke was going to appear from the top of his head. “Do you know what kind of person Lu Qi is? Do you know what kind of place the Lu Residence is? How did you end up as his concubine? And...and you even got pregnant?”

On the contrary, Fu Yin became calm. “In Guangzhou, the Lu family set our house on fire and caused our mother’s death. They caused our entire Fu Residence to be reduced to ashes. I came to take revenge.”

“I already said to leave it to me to take revenge.” Fu Tao let go of Fu Yin and paced around. “Aren’t you making trouble? I have already become one of Lu Yunji’s trusted men and will soon be able to make my move. Why did you bring yourself into this? Did Lu Qi force you? That bastard, I will kill him!”

Fu Yin shook her head vigorously, “No, he did not force me. Amongst everyone here, he treats me the best.”

“What did you say?” Fu Tao was burning with anger as he pointed over the high wall. “Do you still remember a man called Du Ning outside of here? He is going crazy looking for you. Yet you are in here helping our enemy to give birth...”

Fu Yin covered her mouth to muffle her sobs.

The two of them did not realise an evil shadow was hiding in the corner of the courtyard.

Lu Hanxing had escaped and never thought that he would witness this scene. He sneered. *Great, he could save himself now thanks to these two dumb siblings.*

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Sheng Chumu was back from hunting but could not find Fu Rou anywhere. He felt his heart drop and was afraid that she had left without saying goodbye. He knew that she was feeling torn internally. That was why he had been trying his best to use his actions to prove that he could give her a family.

Sheng Chumu rushed by the lake and suddenly heard the sound of water splashing. He looked over the lake and halted. He laughed at himself for thinking too much. Fu Rou was wearing only thin innerwear and was washing herself by the lake. It was like a painting of a beauty beside water. The only thing lacking was the radiance of spring.

“You...close your eyes.” Fu Rou very soon felt Sheng Chumu’s presence. She saw how he was hugging his knees with his mouth open, saliva about to drool out.

“I have already seen everything. I am not closing my eyes.” He laughed and opened his eyes wider.

“Frivolous.” Fu Rou said in a displeased tone. She slowly walked onto the shore and combed her hair on the grass. “You can at least bring my outer robe to me.”

Sheng Chumu’s gaze did not shift as he looked at her back view. “What outer robe?”

Fu Rou turned back and laughed, “Look by your feet.”

Sheng Chumu lowered his head and realised that he was stepping on her outer robe. Although he wanted to look at her more, he was worried that she would be cold and eventually picked up her outer robe. Something fell out of her robe and he stared for a moment before bending over and picking it up. It was Yan Zifang’s beloved Longevity Pendant. He said that it was a betrothal gift.

Sheng Chumu kept the Longevity Pendant and handed the outer robe to Fu Rou.

“Rou’er, I think we need to redo something.” He tested.

“Redo what?” Fu Rou did not understand.

“Didn’t you say that a hunter’s family saved you on Cangshan Mountain and even gave you a set of clean clothes? Before we leave, we should go and thank them.” *Tell him the truth. Don’t let his imagination run wild.*

“...” No matter how smart Fu Rou is, she could not read someone’s mind. “Let’s talk about it when we get a chance in the future.”

“...Okay, we can talk about it next time.” He changed to a casual tone, “I shot a few wild ducks. Let’s keep one to eat and sell the rest in the city. We will get money once we sell them.”

“Chumu...” Fu Rou had thought about this multiple times. “I want to see my family.”

Sheng Chumu’s expression hardened. “So in the end you still want to return to Chang’an.”

Fu Rou explained, “No, I meant my Elder Sister, Fu Jun. She is in Guangzhou with my Brother-in-law. It is not far from here.”

Sheng Chumu was slightly surprised as he chuckled, “Okay, let me go with you. Let’s sell the ducks first to get some money for the journey.”

Fu Rou nodded as she wore her outer robe and muslin hat. As the

two of them walked down the mountain, they met with two minor officials.

“Eh, what do you have in your hands?” One of the minor officials spoke rudely.

“Wild ducks. I just caught them” *Was there even a need to ask?*

“You look pretty strong for a petty thief.”

“Who did you call a thief?” As soon as his young master temperament flared, he was formidable.

“I am talking about you.” The minor official pissed Sheng Chumu off even more. “My grandfather is Guangzhou’s Lord Cao, Cao Junlin. Lord Cao said that all the natural areas around Guangzhou belong to the Emperor. If you hunt in the Emperor’s mountain, you have to pay hunting taxes. If not, you are considered to be stealing from the Emperor and the punishment is death. Country bumpkin, you are lucky that I shall let you go this time. However, the wild ducks are stolen goods. Out of the goodness of our hearts, we shall help you get rid of it.” As the minor official said this, he extended his head. However, Sheng Chumu twisted his arm causing the minor official to cry out in pain.

Fu Rou spoke softly to Sheng Chumu, “Don’t create more attention, we need to hide our identities.”

Sheng Chumu fiercely let go of the minor official.

Fu Rou handed the wild ducks over and spoke gently, “We are sorry. Young officials, please be magnanimous and not bother about us.”

“Peh, lowly things, I want...” However, his imposing manner shriveled away as soon as Sheng Chumu glared at him. His hand still hurt. “I shall not bother with you all!” He snatched the wild ducks and walked off.

“He is just an official in Guangzhou but dares to use the Emperor’s name to collect taxes and prey on the citizens. If I were in Chang’an, a single sentence would...” Sheng Chumu took two steps but did not hear Fu Rou’s footsteps. He turned back to see her still standing on

the spot. "Rou'er, is there something wrong?"

"Chumu..." Fu Rou lifted her gaze, looking like she had made up her mind. "I don't want to go anymore."

"What did you say?" Sheng Chumu clenched his fists.

"We have a close relationship and it is important that we stay together, but does it mean that other things are not important? Just for our happiness, we are causing our family to worry about us day and night. Moreover, we have to hide our identities and cannot go out in the open."

"Do you regret it so much?" *It did not matter how much he did, it was all useless.*

"You are talented in literary and martial arts. You are an outstanding hero and can fight for the country and free the citizens. You can contribute to a better future for our country and make your parents proud. But what are we doing now? Because of me, you get insulted by those men and have to bear with it. I can't let you do this any longer and diminish your ambition. I can't let you live the rest of your life so ordinarily."

In the end, she would regret it, so would he. They should turn back while they have the chance. "We were wrong right from the beginning. We only thought of ourselves and wanted to escape. But if we run now, we have to run for the rest of our lives. Our parents will have to worry about us for their entire lives. We can no longer show what we learn and are capable of. We can't repay our parents. As long as we work together, we will definitely find a solution."

Sheng Chumu lowered his eyes and Fu Rou could not tell what he was feeling. His tone was calm. "Then let's go back."

Fu Rou did not think anything was strange and thought that he had thought things through. "Okay, let's not run anymore. Let's go back together and courageously face any challenges posed our way. One day, we will be able to be together outrightly and receive everyone's blessing. I will go and pack. We will leave after."

“The hunter that saved you on Cangshan Mountain has the surname Yan right? Yan Zifang.” Sheng Chumu spoke coldly.

Fu Rou, who was leaving excitedly, was stunned as she turned back. “How did you know?”

“No wonder you keep wanting to return to Chang’an. No wonder you don’t let me touch you even after so many days.” *Sheng Chumu ah Sheng Chumu. You are a fool.*

He took out the Longevity Pendant and threw it in front of her. He turned in the other direction. “From now on, you can go on your way.”

Fu Rou chased after him. “Chumu, listen to me...”

Sheng Chumu spun around and grabbed ahold of Fu Rou’s shoulders. His gaze was menacing. “Stay far away from me. When I get angry, I can kill.” He then pushed her to the ground.

When Fu Rou got up, he had already disappeared before she could chase after him.

She stared blankly in the direction Sheng Chumu disappeared in as tears streamed down her cheeks. They supported each other the entire journey, fooling themselves and each other. She had been forcing down the guilt she was feeling. However, as she saw the officials use their power to bully them today and how Sheng Chumu had to suppress his anger, she decided that they could not carry on any longer.

They were the same. Although they were in Guangzhou, their hearts were in Chang’an. An invisible string was tied around their hearts, pulling on their conscience. The more it pulled, the more painful it became such that every step they took felt like a tear to their hearts.

If he cared about how she was feeling, then she was willing to be the bad person. She had to convince him to take the proper route and love each other openly. Only happiness obtained in that manner would be able to last a long time.

This time, he did not have to find her. She would find him. It did not

matter if she had to chase, shout, beg or cling onto him without letting go.

This is the end of volume 1!! It's a bit of a strange spot to end, but the second volume is going to be action packed and very dramatic!

Stay tuned! The novel gets increasingly more dark and becomes more unpredictable. Even until the very last chapter, I could not predict the outcome. Hope you guys will enjoy!!

Court Lady

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In Fu Rou's memory, when the jasmine flowers in Fan Square bloomed, summer was about to come. She loved to go there to look at the flowers and sketch them so that she could embroider them later.

A year had passed since she left Chang'an for Guangzhou and currently she was walking through her favourite square, smelling that familiar fragrance. However, she no longer felt the same as in the past.

She missed her parents, Fu Tao, who had joined the military, and Fu Yin, who was missing. She also missed the various palace female officials and palace maids in the Seamstress Department. She missed her good friend, Li Baolin and even Empress Zhangsun, who was often sick. Although she had entered the palace against her will, it was already part of her fate and she felt a responsibility to return and say her farewells properly.

"Eh, pretty lady. Why are you all alone?" A glib yet familiar voice floated into her ears.

Fu Rou pulled herself out from her reminiscence. She looked up to see a plump face and did not know whether to laugh or cry. She never thought that she would see Chen You ever again!

"Oh, Fu Rou! I finally found you!" Chen You immediately recognised

Fu Rou and immediately gestured to the people behind him to surround her.

A passerby saw that something was wrong and asked Fu Rou if she wanted help to report to the officials. Chen You shouted, "She is my officially wedded wife. Report it if you want, I still want to seek justice for myself. On the day of our marriage, she did not even step into my Chen family's residence and went back to her own residence. She tricked my family of over a few thousand taels."

"Since you claim that I am your wife, then show me the marriage certificate." Fu Rou was not a weak woman.

Chen You froze as he recalled selling the marriage certificate. However, he pressed on after considering how many of his useless friends that he had with him today. "Who cares about a marriage certificate. On the day that you married me, all these people were present to drink the celebratory wine."

Everyone agreed with him. The people around them thought that they were having a couple fight and did not bother.

They cornered Fu Rou and forced her slowly to a small alley. She started to panic as she saw Chen You's claws about to touch her shoulder.

"Harassing girls in broad daylight. How bold of you." Someone whacked Chen You's claws away and stood in front of Fu Rou, with one hand holding hers.

Fu Rou recognised the voice as well as the back view and bit her lip lightly. She thought that she wouldn't find him again.

"Who are you? Why are you holding my girl? Let go!" As Chen You saw how they were holding hands, his soybean-sized eyes jutted out.

Sheng Chumu raised his fist and punched the mud brick wall. A hole immediately appeared. Chen You and his bad friends gagged.

"Okay, I'm the one that is harassing ladies. Not you. This lady has caught my eye." Sheng Chumu pulled Fu Rou away as soon as he finished talking.

It was then that Chen You took a step forward. Suddenly, a sword brushed past the top of his head. Sheng Chumu's gaze was terrifying. "Is it worth it to put your life on the line for a woman?"

Chen You was frightened. "No no, I...I just wanted to ask. You...you are so impressive, may I know where you are from?"

"I am the famous..." Sheng Chumu coincidentally caught sight of the wanted poster of Hong Yide. "The famous Hong Yide's...subordinate."

Chen You was trembling in fear. "Very...very famous."

Sheng Chumu smirked and led Fu Rou away.

A devious look immediately took over Chen You's face. Great, so he is a bandit. It didn't matter if he lost his wife, the reward money was good too. He was going to notify the officials!

As soon as Sheng Chumu walked into a safe place, he let go of Fu Rou's hand and walked forward by himself. He counted in his heart. She would run after him. After all, she was the one that kept a secret from him, she should pacify him and coax him sweetly. However, after walking quite a distance, his ears were straining to hear something but he did not hear Fu Rou call for him. He did not even hear her footsteps.

He turned back to look but realised that there was no one behind him. He rushed back. As soon as he turned the corner, he saw her squatting on the floor. Fu Rou heard the noise and lifted her head. Her tears had yet to dry.

"It is not that I cannot bear to let you go. I am angry, very angry!" His words remained stubborn. "Let me tell you, I will not forgive you so easily--"

"I am sorry." She suddenly got up and hugged him. "I should not have hid the things that happened on Cangshan Mountain from you. But there is an inside story, Yan Zifang and I..."

His expression changed from one of enjoyment back to its hardened state. "Don't talk about him! You are not in the wrong. I was the one that forced you to elope. In the past, I was a hedonist, how am I

worthy of marrying you? Yan Zifang had a childhood betrothal with you, Prince Zhou protects you in the palace, and Grand Prince Liang is of royal status. Even that good-for-nothing Chen You had a marriage certificate with you. What about me? I have nothing and am nothing to you!”

“Don’t say that. I shouldn’t have lied to you.” She had reflected.

“Forget it, I lied to you before. It serves me right to be lied to.” It was time to reconcile, he had been suffering as he resisted. “But you cannot do it again in the future.”

Fu Rou pressed her face closed to his neck as she nodded. She had missed his warmth. Sheng Chumu started to become cocky. “You actually really like me, right?”

“Yes, I like you.” In the past, she had always pretended to be strong. However, her heart had gone to him a long time ago.

“Of all the men in the world, who do you care about the most?” He was nervous.

“Sheng Chumu.”

“Are you only going to listen to what Sheng Chumu says?” He looked into her eyes.

“I will only listen to what Sheng Chumu says.” She did not hesitate at all. He was very satisfied and held her hand as they walked forward.

Sheng Chumu was most afraid of Fu Rou not having feelings for him. She was unlike other girls and did not stick or rely on him. She was very independent and smart such that she was able to solve difficult situations by herself. It was hard for him to appear as a hero in front of her. However, she was not good at saying sappy things. Hence, he felt assured with what she had said.

Lu Residence.

Fu Tao was holding onto Fu Yin’s shoulders as he shook her

vigorously. He gritted his teeth. He never thought that there would be a day where his younger sister would meet their family's enemy, much less become their concubine.

"Third Brother, calm down." Fu Yin tried to shake off Fu Tao's hands.

"Calm my ass! You can take revenge but why must you give your innocence away to the son of our enemy? If Mother was alive, she would have been driven to death because of you." He tried to grab her hand. "Come, return with me!"

All of a sudden, Fu Tao realised something was off. There was a shadow at the corner and there seemed to be a person hiding there.

"Who is behaving so suspiciously?" His gaze was sharp.

Lu Hanxing was confident in the information that he had gotten as he stood up without fear. "Stop shouting, we are all in the same boat. Lu Yunji is your enemy and mine as well." He pulled up his sleeves to expose the scars from the rope that bound his wrist. "Lu Yunji, that old geezer, does not even recognise kinship. I must be super unlucky to be his nephew. Xi Tao, no, Fu Tao, let's collaborate. We can burn this grand and majestic Duke Chen Residence to ashes like the Fu Residence."

Fu Yin glared at him with hatred. "Third Brother, don't listen to him. He was the one that set fire to our house and killed our mother!"

"So it was you!" Fu Tao bellowed. He punched Lu Hanxing, causing Lu Hanxing to see stars. Fu Tao jumped onto him and took out his dagger, about to pierce his heart.

Lu Hanxing shouted, "Wait! Let's talk! That's right, I was the one that set the Fu Residence on fire but do you know who was the one that ordered me to do so? It was Lu Qi! It is the bastard father of the child in your sister's stomach!"

Fu Yin was in disbelief. "You are lying!"

"Your Second Sister saw the hidden valuables that the Lu Residence was sending back to their family house. In order to keep it a secret, Lu Qi asked me to eliminate your family completely and to set

everyone with the surname Fu on fire.” Lu Hanxing was simply acting on orders.

Fu Yin shook her head as she cried. “That is not it. You are lying! You are lying!”

“Sheng Chumu!” Lu Hanxing said a surprising name as he laughed. “You can ask Sheng Chumu. On the night that the Fu Residence was set on fire, who invited him out for a drink? Lu Qi accompanied Sheng Chumu to drink while scheming and thinking when the Fu Residence would be burned to ashes. After the incident, Lu Qi told me that he could see the smoke rising into the air from their window where they were drinking. The blaze of the fire was exciting and went well with their alcohol! I had no choice but to do as I was told while Lu Qi was the true mastermind. Lu Qi was the one that killed your mother. Yet, you are helping him to give birth. What a good daughter! What a filial daughter!”

“You better shut up...shut up! Stop talking!” Fu Yin lost control of her emotions as she snatched the dagger from Fu Tao’s hands and stabbed Lu Hanxing. Lu Hanxing cried out in pain. He had never thought that Fu Yin would stab him.

Fu Yin had lost all reason as she stabbed him a few times. Even after Lu Hanxing had stopped breathing, she still did not stop. Fu Tao hugged her tightly. “Stop it! He is already dead!”

Fu Yin looked at how Lu Hanxing was drenched in blood. She froze. *She had killed someone!*

“Third Brother, you should leave.” She heard a cold voice coming out from her own mouth. It was completely unlike her.

“I can’t leave you behind.” Fu Tao was extremely worried as he looked at Fu Yin.

“You can leave me here to finish what I have to do or you can carry my corpse back right now.” She pointed the dagger in her hands at her own throat. Fu Yin was expressionless. “Choose.”

Fu Tao was anxious. “Don’t do anything foolish. I will listen to you.”

He gritted his teeth and jumped over the wall.

At this moment, the guards that were searching for Lu Hanxing found them. As they saw the mangled state Lu Hanxing was in, they hurriedly called Lu Qi. He slowly walked towards Fu Yin, who was sitting paralysed on the floor.

“Yin’er.” Lu Qi pushed away Mo Li, who was supporting him.

Fu Yin’s gaze was lifeless. “Lu Hanxing, he...suddenly jumped out from the corner. He wanted to...I was unwilling and he wanted to kill me...I didn’t know how...”

Lu Qi kneeled and embraced Fu Yin. At the same time, he took the dagger from her hands. “Don’t be afraid. I am here.” He carried Fu Yin and walked while scolding the guards. “A bunch of useless shits! You can’t even watch a criminal and let him run and hurt others. Luckily Fu Yin is bright and knows how to defend herself. If anything happens to the child in Fu Yin, I will get rid of you! And Fu Yin is wrong. I was the one that killed this person. If my father asks, you have to reply with this. Anyone who dares to say anything more shall die!”

Aww... Fu Yin..(What do you think she'll do now that she found out Lu Qi is the one who instructed the fire?

Court Lady

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Lingxiao Palace.

Prince Zhou was reading Cao Yuan's statement of confession as Concubine Yan walked in. She had brought him some nourishing soup.

She sat down and watched her son drink the soup obediently. She glanced at the table and acted indifferently. "How has the case on Cangshan Mountain been going?"

"Cao Yuan admitted to clashing with Lu Qi but fervently denies exposing the return route to Chang'an. He said that Lu Qi only released the planned route to the troops just before they set out. Lu Qi even expressed that the return route will only be shown on the day that they were to set off. Unexpectedly, Cao Yuan's leg was injured and he was not able to lead the troops. He did not even get a chance to see the second half of the planned route. I also found it weird. Cao Yuan is a minister with contributions and is favoured. Why would he collude with bandits just because he doesn't like Lu Qi?"

"There is something fishy here." Concubine Yan fell silent for a while. "It is rare that your Imperial Father is relying on you, you have to dig deeper. There is also someone you have to take note of."

"Who?" Prince Zhou asked.

“Fan Zhang.” Concubine Yan smiled. “Fan Zhang happened to fall sick right before the Empress set off. He is the reason why Lu Qi had the chance to take over and lead the troops. Could Fan Zhang have known that someone was going to attack the Empress and pretended to be sick?”

“General Fan is an old minister trusted greatly by His Majesty and the Empress. He has always taken charge of the Royal family’s safety on trips. If he has intentions to betray, then things will be serious. Mother, your reminder is right. I will check up on him. Imperial Father’s safety is the most important. Without concrete proof, he is still innocent. I will have to convince Imperial Father to consider another person to lead the Imperial Guards.”

“Then Lu Yunji and his son...” Concubine Yan continued.

“I will continue to pursue the matter. The Lu family’s father and son already has a record of taking advantage of citizens. They might be blinded by greed and may have colluded with the rebel troops.” Prince Zhou knew deep down.

“Then I can be rest assured.” Concubine Yan’s tone changed. “Are you still upset over Fu Siyan?”

Prince Zhou was silent.

“It is a pity that something like this happened to Fu Siyan. But this is fate and it is impossible to change. Since she is no longer around, you have to take care of yourself. The future is long.” She never thought that such a smart girl will have such an ill fate.

“Mother, please do not worry. I know what to do.” Prince Zhou tried his best to sound emotionless.

“Since you know, then why are you still wearing this robe?” Concubine Yan sighed softly. She could tell that Prince Zhou was still wearing the robe that Fu Rou made for him. “Seeing an object makes you miss the person more. It hurts your heart and your body.”

Prince Zhou stood up. “I will take it off now.”

Concubine Yan watched as he left and let out a long sigh. Yu He, who

accompanied Concubine Yan, suddenly said, "The Imperial Guards have been the most difficult to handle. With Fan Zhang and Cao Yuan gone, our people will finally have a chance."

Concubine Yan raised her brows and exchanged looks with Yu He. The corners of her mouth lifted as a sharp look appeared on her face. It was an expression completely unlike the ones she had shown before.

Fu Rou assessed the guest inn's room. It was one of the best rooms. The innkeeper requested that they pay the price of staying a day beforehand. Sheng Chumu straightforwardly agreed and left with the innkeeper. She did not say anything. The thing that she learnt most from the quarrel was to protect his pride. If he said that they could stay here, she would stay.

Fu Rou opened the window to let the air in and heard a knocking sound from below. She looked down only to see Sheng Chumu. His arm was exposed and he was in the midst of chopping wood. Beside him was a pile of chopped wood, stacked like a tiny mountain.

She suddenly understood how they got money to pay for the room and could not help but be moved. Du Ning once said that before Sheng Chumu met her, Sheng Chumu could not even ride a horse properly. He had been pampered since he was young. As the son of a Duke, he had changed from his past character to his hardworking self now.

She stared for a while before walking out. She wanted to ask the innkeeper to help arrange some things and in return she would pay him using embroideries. As soon as the innkeeper saw an embroidered handkerchief that she had made before, he immediately agreed.

Sheng Chumu was done with his tasks as he rolled his sore shoulders. He neaten his appearance in front of the room door and plastered a wide smile on his face. He pushed open the door.

"Rou'er, I am back---" He was stunned.

The guest room was completely different from before. A crimson satin was hung across the bed frame and the bedsheets were changed to crimson sheets. There were even two red candles on the table and a spread of dishes and wine. A brilliant 'Double Happiness' sign was plastered on the window. It was clearly a bridal room!

"Don't just stand there, come over and have a cup of wine." Fu Rou was still wearing the same clothes as before but now she was wearing a slight bit of makeup. She had combed and arranged her hair delicately. She looked gorgeous under the candlelight.

Sheng Chumu subconsciously moved and sat near her. He asked her in a daze. "What type of wine is this?"

Fu Rou blushed a pink shade. "What do you think?"

"This room is like a bridal room and this cup of wine is like the ones used to exchange between a bride and groom. But I am slightly confused. Rou'er, you--" On their entire way here, she had been guarding herself and even holding hands was too much for her.

Fu Rou cut him off, "In the past, I always felt like marriage had to be a bustling event. We had to have parents by our side, if not we would regret it for the rest of our lives. Now, I have thought it through. No matter how exciting, it is just a single day's event. Who I marry is for a lifetime. As long as I am with the right person, even if the marriage is not exciting, it is worth it."

She paused. He did not dare to breathe out of fear that he would miss out something she said.

"Chumu, are you willing to be my husband?"

"..." His gaze was locked on her beautiful face. "Why do I always feel like a fool and am being led by my nose by you."

"You are not willing? Then I won't force you." Her expression did not change as she lowered the cup of wine. However, his hand caught hers before she could place it down.

"You cannot take back what you have said." He controlled his facial expression although he was jumping for joy internally. "Once we

exchange cups, we will be husband and wife.”

He hooked onto her hand and she hooked onto his in return. They exchanged cups and drank the wine.

“We don’t have a matchmaker and shall have to do it by ourselves. We have to eat a little bit of the peanuts, dates...ah!”

He carried her in his arms and headed straight for the bed. “We can eat the peanuts and dates later, I want to eat the yummiest thing first!”

“No, put me down. You can’t ignore the rules.” She hit his chest.

He did not seem to budge as he lowered her onto the bed and lay over her. “I will follow my own rules when marrying my wife. Let’s hear you call me dear husband.”

Her face was completely red. “So embarrassing, I won’t say it.”

“If you don’t say it, I will.” This time, he could not scare his wife away. He was going to treat her well. “My dear wife! My dear wife! My Sheng Chumu’s dear dear wife!”

“Lower voice, be careful not to let others hear you.” She covered his mouth.

“Embarrassed? Then let us do something that will make you more shy.” He used his mouth to cover hers as his other hand lightly unhooked the silk curtain.

The red candle light swayed bashfully and spring arrived behind the curtain.

Awww so sweet. But nopeeee. This is not the end! We have a lot more drama coming up soon...

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That night, Fu Yin could not sleep properly. However, she was used to waking up early and headed to Lu Qi's room. Lu Qi was still in deep sleep. Although he had regained consciousness, his body was still weak and he was easily tired. She carried a copper basin and stood by the door as she looked at his sleeping image with a pained look. She was troubled and worried that she had given herself to the true culprit behind her mother's death.

What made it all the more difficult to endure was that she had actually fallen for him! She hated him so much that she almost broke her teeth from gritting them together. However, the little life in her was so precious to her. It was like a clash between fire and ice!

Lu Qi suddenly turned over.

Fu Yin was stunned as she gazed at the copper basin in her hands. She turned and walked out. Her serving had become an illness. She was so attentive even to her enemy. She walked at a fast pace for a distance before suddenly feeling a disgusted feeling in her chest. She held onto the wall as she dry heaved. The copper basin fell onto the ground.

An honest-looking old lady appeared and picked up the copper basin. "I am here to see Qi'er. You must be Yin'er. Yingying mentioned you before."

Fu Yin's face was pale as she took the copper basin. "Mmhm, that is me. However, Young Master is still not awake. I can go and call him."

The old lady waved her hand. "No need, no need. Let him sleep. Let's just wait for him." She smiled as she assessed Fu Yin. "You are pregnant, aren't you?"

Fu Yin was startled and looked at the old lady. She was slightly embarrassed as she touched her stomach.

"Yingying was praising you non-stop yesterday on how you are attentive and gentle to Lu Qi. You take care of him very well. From what I can see, you are indeed gentle and nimble. Your appearance is beautiful as well. Qi'er is not someone that is easily moved. If he is willing to let you give birth to his child, it means that he really likes you." The old lady's smile was kind.

"Old Madam, who are..."

The old lady did not reply as she fondly recalled Lu Qi's childhood. He had fought with their neighbours, the brothers from the Niu family. He fought all three of them and was covered in injuries. He had a huge wound on his leg and she had to apply medicine for him for two whole months. She had been afraid that he could not walk long distances in the future.

Fu Yin laughed. "He was so naughty since he was young?" No wonder, he had such a temper now!

"He wasn't naughty, he just could not stand being bullied. He fought with whoever that dared to say he was motherless. If anyone dared to bully Yingying, he could not stand it even more. He was determined to fight until they bow and admit their mistakes. With such a temper, no wonder he became a general when he grew up."

The old lady sighed, "My Hanxing is not as good as him."

Fu Yin froze as she stammered, "Lu Hanxing...Hanxing is your..."

The old lady smiled. "I am Hanxing's mother. You should have seen him before right?"

Fu Yin nodded.

“Has he grown fatter or slimmer? Has he grown taller?” As she saw something off from Fu Yin’s expression, she thought that she was being rude. “Look at me, I am asking all these useless questions. When he comes back from delivering the message to the neighbouring city, I will know when I see him right?”

After Lu Hanxing’s incident, Lu Yunji had hid the news from the old lady and said that the Zhao family’s daughter could not give birth and he managed to cancel the marriage in time. He then said that Lu Hanxing had military duties and is not in the residence. The old lady did not think much of it.

Fu Yin lowered her head guiltily and saw a speck of red on the tips of her shoes. It was Lu Hanxing’s blood. She did not manage to hide her feet in time when the old lady saw it as well.

“Eh? What is that stain on your shoes?” The old lady bent over and used her sleeve to wipe it. “It is such a beautiful pair of embroidered flower shoes. It is such a pity if it is ruined...why does it look like blood?”

Fu Yin’s mind went blank.

“I had a nosebleed yesterday and Yin’er helped me to clean it. It accidentally stained her shoes.” Lu Qi appeared behind Fu Yin. “Second Aunt. I am sorry for not picking you up yesterday, I was sick.”

The old lady’s voice became even gentler. “Child, why are you still so courteous with me? Back then you, Yingying and Hanxing were like little monkeys. When you all were fighting for sweet potatoes, none of you had any manners at all. Just for a piece of sweet potato, you and Hanxing were ready to overthrow the heavens.”

Lu Qi smiled like a child. “Such a long time ago and you are still bringing it up to tease me.” He held onto Fu Yin’s shoulders.

Fu Yin shivered and her expression changed in a flash from disgusted to tolerance.

Second Aunt did not notice. "Eh, you look like a couple. If my Hanxing can find someone as beautiful and kind as Yin'er in the future, I would be extremely happy. Yin'er ah, you are carrying Qi'er's flesh and blood. As an elder, I have to give you a welcome gift." She took out a simple handkerchief and a bracelet. "This bracelet was meant for Hanxing's wife. But Qi'er's father said that the marriage will not be going through. I shall give it to you since I coincidentally met you. I wish for you to have a blissful and long future with Qi'er."

Fu Yin quickly rejected it. "No, I cannot accept this." *She had killed Lu Hanxing!*

Lu Qi knew the reason why Fu Yin had rejected. "Since you prepared it for Hanxing's future wife, why are you giving it to her?"

"I have watched both you and Yingying grow up and you are like my biological children. Now that you all have people you like, I am treating all of you equally. When Hanxing gets married, I will give him something else. This is for Yin'er. Take it. If you don't, I will get angry." The old lady was sincere.

"Second Aunt is giving it to you. Just accept it." Lu Qi did not want to make the old lady suspicious.

Fu Yin froze and the old lady took the chance to put the bracelet on her wrist.

Fu Yin looked down at the bloodstain on her shoe and mumbled, "Thank you, Second Old Madam."

The old lady smiled. "Call me Second Aunt."

Fu Yin abided, "Second Aunt."

The old lady happily acknowledged, "Yin'er you have to stay by Qi'er's side for a long time. My Hanxing is a clumsy person. If he ever does something wrong and makes Qi'er or his father angry, you have to help him for my sake. I am counting on you."

Fu Yin opened her mouth but did not say anything. She merely made an *mmhm* sound.

She did not feel apologetic towards Hanxing. Regardless of whether it was Lu Qi's order, Lu Hanxing was an accomplice. Moreover, he had harboured errant intentions towards her. However, this kind old lady in front of her made her uncomfortable. People said that elation accompanied the completion of one's revenge, but she did not feel happy. Instead, all she felt was a suffocating emptiness.

Meanwhile, it was Sheng Chumu and Fu Rou's first day as a wedded couple.

Sheng Chumu helped Fu Rou to comb her hair and draw her eyebrows. "I have decided to abandon my stinking title as the eldest son of Duke Lu and work diligently to support my wife."

Fu Rou smiled. "You thought about this?"

"No, I also thought about other things." He was a good husband who thought about his wife. "You are right. We cannot spend our entire lives hiding and making our parents worry. Now that we have gotten married, we should find a place to settle down. Thereafter, I will think of a way for us to stay together and yet reunite with our loved ones. But you have to give me time. You cannot let your imagination run wild and you cannot leave me."

"When did I ever leave you?" She respected him but she was not going to give up being herself after getting married. "Yesterday, you threw a fit and left me behind, leaving on your own."

"I had no choice. If I didn't leave you and scare you, would you have been willing to exchange marriage wine with me and stay in a bridal room?" *This was called taking a step back in order to advance forward.* "In addition, you are not allowed to contact Yan Zifang in the future. You are also not allowed to meet Prince Zhou. Basically, you are not allowed to talk to any other men."

Fu Rou casted a side glance at him. "I am already here. How can I ever meet them again?"

"Therefore, there are positive things about eloping. You no longer

have to meet people you should not be meeting.” Sheng Chumu chuckled, “Are you hungry? What do you feel like eating? I will ask them to send some dishes up.”

Fu Rou shook her head. “The firewood you chopped was enough for one night’s stay. Why do we need to order dishes? I will be happy just eating a bun that you buy.”

“Okay, I will go and buy you the tastiest bun now.” Sheng Chumu walked to the door and suddenly turned back. He looked serious. “Rou’er, even though we did not have a matchmaker, our parents and did not go through the entire ritual of bowing to the temple, we are already husband and wife, right?” He lacked a sense of security and had to hear her confirm it.

“Yes.”

Her confirmation was worth a lot.

“Since we are already a married couple, we cannot leave each other. You cannot head back to Chang’an behind my back.” Because she was kind, she always thought of others before herself.

“Your fears are groundless.” Her eyes curved in the shape of a crescent moon.

“I spend so much effort to marry a female tiger like you. It is normal to have many fears.” They almost truly became the Cowherd Boy and Weaver Girl.

“Who did you call a female tiger?” She placed her hands on her hips.

“I am not the one that called you a female tiger. It was Fu Tao.” Sheng Chumu quickly found someone to blame as he turned and ran out. “I will go and buy a bun for you. My dear wife, you just have to wait for your husband to return!”

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Fu Rou never would have expected trouble to arrive before Sheng Chumu returned.

Previously, Sheng Chumu bluffed and said that he was Hong Yide's subordinate. Now, the official guards were all looking for him in the inn. She naturally could not just sit and wait as she asked the innkeeper and found out that Sheng Chumu had headed west of the city. She rushed to find him.

Unexpectedly, she did not meet Sheng Chumu but bumped into her elder sister and brother-in-law. Furthermore, her brother-in-law was binded and led by the official guards. She heard that he was captured for indulging in a wanted criminal, Hong Yide.

Fu Rou could not understand. With the kind of courage that her brother-in-law has, why would he be involved with Hong Yide? However, when she saw her elder sister begging pitifully as she followed her husband, Fu Rou could not stand and watch. She mingled amongst the crowd and went to the government office to see what was happening.

Xu Youtong was usually inflexible as a government official and flattered his superiors. He never thought that he would get blamed for helping a wanted criminal. However, he did not dare to step out of bounds and simply cry out that he was innocent. Minister Fan

knocked the gavel and prepared to give him his sentence.

Fu Jun has always been a gentle person. However, this time she was determined to defend her husband. "Minister Fan, my husband is an official. You cannot subject him to torture to force him to confess."

Minister Fan blew at his moustache and glared. "This is not somewhere you can speak. Drag her out."

Fu Jun did not yield. "Just to catch Hong Yide, you all caused everyone to panic and be fearful. As the County Magistrate of Guangzhi County, my husband simply stood up for the citizens that were wrongly captured. How is that wrong? How can you falsely accuse him of colluding with bandits? Although Hong Yide's men appeared in Guangzhi County initially, they were committing crimes in Guangzhou yesterday. Does it mean you are going to accuse Guangzhou's official, Official Cao, for colluding as well?"

Minister Fan was guilty. Cao Junlin had been through this with Minister Fan. Lu Yunji was pursuing the matter with Hong Yide and they had to find someone to take the blame.

Fu Jun continued, "My second sister, Fu Rou, is the Empress' Siyan. Just for your own greed, you are falsely accusing your subordinates and meting out severe punishments. What will be the consequence if the Emperor and Empress hears about this?"

"How impressive it is to have a younger sister who is a female official attending to Her Majesty." Minister Fan sneered, "If your sister were still alive, perhaps I would show you some face. But now, a dead female official cannot save you."

Fu Jun was stunned. "What did you say?"

"Foolish woman! Why do you think Official Cao is announcing his intention to capture all of Hong Yide's men? It is because Hong Yide committed a huge crime in Chang'an. I have just received the news. Hong Yide caused a disturbance on Cangshan Mountain resulting in numerous deaths. One of them is the Fu Siyan serving the Empress."

"Dead?" Fu Jun could not stand as she was in disbelief. "That cannot

be...no! Second Sister cannot die! You are spouting rubbish! You are framing my husband and cursing my sister! You are despicable!”

“This woman is hindering me from carrying out my duties and is raging in court.” Minister Fan threw out a bamboo tag. “Cane her!”

Two bailiffs held Fu Jun on the ground. Fu Rou could not watch any longer as she walked into court and shouted for them to stop.

Fu Jun struggled to lift her head. Her eyes lit up in surprise. “Rou’er!”

Fu Rou smiled at her elder sister and indicated to her to rest assured. She turned to Minister Fan. “My surname is Fu and my name is Rou. I belong to the Court Lady Department and am in-charge of the Siyan Office. I am a sixth-ranked official.”

Minister Fan narrowed his eyes. “You are Fu Siyan?”

Fu Rou took out her Identification Plate. “Here is my Identification Plate. Please take a close look at it.”

Minister Fan’s eyesight was good and he could see clearly. “You are really from the palace. But I don’t understand. I am carrying out the case, what reason do you have to interfere?”

“I saw the entire process. Magistrate Xu was not able to catch the wanted criminal and can at most be said to be incapable. Whereas the claim for colluding with Hong Yide is completely baseless. You have no witnesses nor anything to prove that he did it. Why are you holding him captive?”

Minister Fan replied, “Hmph, a palace lady dares to interfere with a local minister handling a case. On account of your status, I won’t pursue this matter. If not, you will be considered disrupting official matters for your own personal interest. You won’t get away even if it is brought up to the Emperor and Empress.” He sneered and ordered the bailiffs to quickly carry out his orders. “What are you standing there for? Cane him!”

“Stop it!” The mountains were huge and the Emperor was far away. Fu Rou reacted quickly. “Fine, then I won’t use my status as palace lady to speak. Let me use Great Tang’s laws. Firstly, without a decree

from court, you cannot act on your own accord and strip a government official of his title and punish him.”

Minister Fan was unafraid as he knew there were people supporting him. “I would tremble in fear when it came to Great Tang’s laws. However, with Hong Yide’s case, the case is serious. I have Prince Zhou’s permission to carry out my duties. If you are going to hinder me, don’t blame me for not being courteous.”

Fu Rou held onto the handkerchief the Empress gave her. *Should she use this?*

“Minister Fan, if I had known that you would use my personal order as an arrow, I would not have given it to you.” All of a sudden, Prince Zhou’s voice sounded. He then walked out from within the crowd. “Fu Siyan is right. The crime that Official Xu is being blamed for is far-fetched and Minister Fan should not obtain confessions by torturing.”

Minister Fan almost fell off his seat. “Your Highness?”

“Guards, take off his official hat and lock him up. I will deal with him later.” Prince Zhou smiled as he ordered Minister Fan to be locked up.

Fu Rou had not managed to speak to her elder sister before Prince Zhou came over and pulled her aside.

“On Cangshan Mountain, when I saw you smile, my heart melted and I let Sheng Chumu take you away.” He had seen Fu Rou and Sheng Chumu reunite. “If you had not appeared again, I would not have interfered. I never thought that you would expose your identity. You have to return to Chang’an. I already gave Sheng Chumu a chance, I will not give him a second chance.”

Fu Rou shook his head off. “Why must I listen to you?”

Prince Zhou whispered into Fu Rou’s ears. “General Xuanwei seduced a palace lady and stole the Empress’ servant from Chang’an and brought her all the way to Guangzhou. If I am in a bad mood and blurt it out, what do you think will happen to Sheng Chumu?”

Fu Rou frowned. Prince Zhou was blackmailing her once again!

“Sheng Chumu is still in the city right? Chen You was the person that reported and said that Hong Yide’s subordinate had stolen his wife. I heard that he once had a marriage agreement with you? That means the Hong Yide’s subordinate that stole his wife was Sheng Chumu?” Prince Zhou knew everything.

“Since you know everything, Sheng Chumu is definitely not Hong Yide’s men.” Fu Rou was angry that he did not speak the truth.

“I know but I have to make it seem like a hard case so that Sheng Chumu and the Duke Lu Residence will be doomed.” He had never been proud of the power he had been born with. But for her, he was willing to use it.

Fu Rou knew that the moment she stepped into the court, her happy life with Sheng Chumu would screech to a stop. But she could not watch as her elder sister and brother-in-law were framed. Moreover, even if Prince Zhou did not blackmail her, she would have to return to Chang’an. Now, she wished that he could understand what difficulties she was having.

Fu Rou followed Prince Zhou until they were in front of his carriage. “I want to see Chumu one more time.” She had to explain properly.

“No! The Cangshan Mountain case has yet to be resolved. I have to rush back to settle it. Moreover, I cannot promise that I won’t capture Sheng Chumu when I see him...” Prince Zhou suddenly turned and grabbed Fu Rou’s hand gently, helping her onto the carriage.

Fu Rou was startled and wanted to pull back her hand. Prince Zhou moved closer. “Sheng Chumu’s future is in your hands. Moreover, if you smile at me now, I promise that I will be well-behaved on the way back to Chang’an.”

Fu Rou remained rigid. Eventually, she thought of Sheng Chumu and smiled at Prince Zhou. What she did not know was that Sheng Chumu was amidst the crowd and Prince Zhou had already caught sight of him and intentionally behaved in this manner.

Sheng Chumu watched as Prince Zhou's carriage rode off. The steaming hot bun fell to the ground as his heart froze over. He did not understand. *Why? Last night, they married one another. Today, she had gone with the wind. Yan Zifang, Prince Zhou, one after the other. They were all in her heart except for him. He was the only one that she could easily abandon.*

He was the world's biggest fool after all.

Awwww...Chumu. T_T

Court Lady

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Fu Yin had a vacant look on her face as she walked slowly down the street.

Every morning, she would hate herself when she saw Lu Qi sleeping beside her. Revenge, revenge. In the end, she was the one that suffered the retaliation. She shared the same pillow as her enemy and in her tummy, she bore her own flesh and blood as well as that of her enemy's. Every time she thought of this, the love and hatred in her heart would clash and she would feel herself crumbling.

"...Yin'er, you are daydreaming again." Lu Yingying ran over. "I called you a few times."

"Let's go back." The noise was making Fu Yin's head hurt.

"I brought you out because you've been looking so depressed and worried these few days." Lu Yingying dragged her and walked into a wine house. "As a person that has been through this, let me tell you that you should not keep your troubles to yourself. You should find a nice place and talk to someone about it. You will feel much better."

Fu Yin laughed, "The nice place you are referring to is a wine house?"

"You have troubles and I have troubles too. To people with troubles, a wine house is the best place to be." Lu Yingying's expression

suddenly turned desolated. "In the past, I never knew that a wine house was such a good place. Ever since I met him, I finally realised..." She was seasoned in downing the cup in one go.

Fu Yin looked at Lu Yingying. She had always felt like Lu Yingying was hiding a secret. Today she could confirm that the secret had something to do with a man. She could not help but wonder who Lu Yingying liked. Lu Yingying had to hide it from her brother and father and had to down her sorrows.

Two wine jars were emptied in a flash. Fu Yin hadn't even finished a single cup. They were all drunk by Lu Yingying.

Lu Yingying held the wine cup and muttered to herself. "...He said that I was not that valuable. Since he looked down on me, why did he give me the Zhenzhu Life-saving Pill? Do you not like me at all or do you like me a little bit but is not willing to admit? No matter what it is, you have hurt me thoroughly. With the memory of one night, I won't try to ask for anything else. I didn't do it for you, I did it for myself. In my lifetime, I will not beg you nor bother you..."

Fu Yin looked at Lu Yingying as she lay on the table, seeming to have fallen asleep. She finally dared to say what she was feeling. "Ever since I stepped into your Lu family, I am no longer the cute and kind Yin'er I used to be. I have turned into a bad woman, an unfilial woman and a murderer. I killed Lu Hanxing."

Lu Yingying suddenly opened her eyes; a look of disbelief was written on her face. "Who did you say you killed?"

Fu Yin did not know how to respond and stared wide-eyed as Lu Yingying ran out of the wine house. She rushed to chase after her and grabbed onto Lu Yingying's sleeve. Pain could be seen on her face.

"Don't touch me!" Lu Yingying felt like her expression was hypocritical and immediately shook off Fu Yin's hand. She turned back and glared. "You murderer! Second Aunt has done so many favours for me and my brother. If not for her, Elder Brother and I would have died a long time ago. My cousin is her only son!"

Fu Yin was unstable and fell backward a few steps. A horse was

galloping fast towards her. The rider saw someone in the way and immediately pulled on the reins and bellowed, "How dare you block my way? I will kick you---"

Fu Yin lifted her head in shock.

"Oh, it is a pretty lady." The rider was Grand Prince Liang and his attitude immediately changed when he saw it was an attractive woman.

Grand Prince Liang was assisting Prince Zhou to settle the case when he slept with General Fan's concubine. The Emperor was furious and removed him from the case. Grand Emperor had also reprimanded him and he was in a horrible mood. Who knew that a pretty lady would fall in front of him.

Lu Yingying recognised Grand Prince Liang and knew his reputation. She did not want to help but as she thought of Lu Qi, she eventually walked beside Fu Yin and greeted Grand Prince Liang gracefully.

"Greetings, Grand Prince Liang. I am Lu Yingying."

"Lu Yingying?" With such an extraordinary beauty like Lu Yingying, Grand Prince Liang no longer looked at Fu Yin. "This surname--"

"My father is Lu Yunji." Lu Yingying brought up her father. "The one who dashed out in front of Your Highness is a servant from my household. Your Highness, please be magnanimous and forgive her. I will discipline her once I get back."

Grand Prince Liang's eyes curved and he smiled. "Okay, I will give you face today."

"Thank you, Your Highness." Lu Yingying glanced coldly at Fu Yin. "Servant, are you not going to follow?" Fu Yin lowered her head and walked quickly after Lu Yingying.

Grand Prince Liang gazed at Lu Yingying's back view for a long time, with a lecherous smile on his face.

Uh oh...

Court Lady

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Grand Prince Liang whistled a tune as he walked towards a wine house. His gang of friends, including Lu Qi, were already there.

Lu Qi immediately offered a drink to Grand Prince Liang and thanked him for saving him in front of the Emperor.

“Good, drink up!” Grand Prince Liang drank the wine and smiled brightly. “Lu Qi, one cup today is not enough. I will have a marriage coming up soon. You will have to offer me three cups of wine.”

His friends all asked Grand Prince Liang about his marriage.

“Grand Emperor has always complained that my residence is missing a wife and was urging me to get one. However, you all know that I am not a simple person. My wife will have to be someone who is of high status and is outstanding. It wasn’t easy and I had to look for a long time.” Grand Prince Liang excitedly announced, “However, hard work paid off and I finally found someone. She is Lu Qi’s younger sister, Lu Yingying. I can not let the daughter of a duke go.”

Lu Qi’s face hardened. He had not imagined that Grand Prince Liang would want his sister. Being in a good relationship with Grand Prince Liang was one thing, giving his sister off was another. Grand Prince Liang’s character was not good.

“This... Your Highness. The opinions of our parents are of utmost

importance. We should not be deciding my sister's marriage by ourselves." Without much choice, Lu Qi replied. He could not throw his sister into the lion's den.

Grand Prince Liang could tell the hidden meaning behind Lu Qi's words. Displeased, he questioned, "What do you mean? You are rejecting me even though I want to help you out?"

Lu Qi's expression immediately changed from a hesitant one to a stern one. He firmly added, "I heard that my father already has plans for my sister's marriage. I am afraid that my sister will not be able to serve you well."

Grand Prince Liang glared at Lu Qi and smirked. He threw his wine cup down and left the wine house in anger. Lu Qi rushed home to inform his father.

Lu Yunji frowned and said, "Although it wasn't a good thing that Grand Prince Liang wanted Lu Yingying, you were too rash to reject him immediately."

"If I didn't reject him directly, would I wait until he officially asks her for marriage?" Lu Qi felt that he had done the right thing. "Who isn't aware of Grand Prince Liang's ways with girls? Instead of becoming Grand Prince Liang's wife, it would be better to just be a commoner and live a peaceful life."

"I will not allow Yingying to marry such a man. However, Grand Prince Liang is in charge of the investigation of Cangshan Mountain and we must not offend him or the consequences will be severe." Lu Yunji was afraid they would become the victims of the villain.

Lu Qi was still stubborn as he stated, "I only have one sister. Despite how severe the consequences are, I cannot allow her to give her happiness away."

Lu Yingying was completely shocked when she coincidentally overheard his words while testifying for Lu Hanxing's death. She had not thought that she would be dragged into the situation by helping Fu Yin. Grand Prince Liang was the Emperor's brother and had the support of the Grand Emperor. This was going to be hard to resolve.

Fu Rou stepped out of her horse carriage and stood in deep thought. She wanted to return but did not think it would be so soon.

The tall walls of the palace stretched out on both sides and separated itself from Chang'an city. She would be stepping into the stormy sea once again but she had to persevere through it. She had never thought of running away and she walked forward with determination and no regrets to fulfill her promise.

Chumu would understand her as she understands him. On the surface, he appeared playful on the surface, he had never imagined that he had inherited his father's heroism. Sheng Chumu would not be able to withstand being helpless in front of injustice.

Prince Zhou extended his arm out for her to take but Fu Rou jumped off the carriage on her own and entered the palace gates to Lizheng Palace.

Empress Zhangsun was relieved when she saw Fu Rou. Master Yuan had been right, Fu Rou was blessed with good fortune. Not only did she want to reward Fu Rou, she wanted to keep Fu Rou constantly by her side and doubled Fu Rou's salary.

Fu Rou was calm and remained humble. She roughly talked about what happened to her while leaving out Yan Zifang, Lu Yingying and Sheng Chumu.

"I was chased after a tiger at Cangshan Mountain and lost my way. I lost consciousness after jumping into a river and when I woke up, I found myself on a boat. I caught a severe cold and was in and out of consciousness for very long hence I was unable to tell my identity to my saviour. A merchant saved me and he brought me to the south. When I arrived at Guangzhou, I told them who I was."

"So you followed the river stream... No wonder there was no news of you. I was very worried." Empress Zhangsun smiled lightly. "You are the same as me. You like vegetables more... Sheng Chumu likes meat, right?"

Fu Rou was surprised and her expression revealed her nervousness.

“You disappeared at Cangshan Mountain and reappeared in Guangzhou. At the same time, Sheng Chumu was also missing as his family reported that he was taking a long leave of absence. Although they said that he was taking a break, they did not specify how long it would be. I thought that you were already dead and did not think that you would return alive. Although you have received many rewards, you appear to be dejected and cannot even eat a meal well.” Empress Zhangsun’s eyes were sharp and she commented, “Sheng Chumu is really brave to take a female internal attendant.”

Fu Rou instantly knelt down and apologised, “It is all my fault and Sheng Chumu had nothing to do with it. Please forgive us, Your Majesty.”

Empress Zhangsun stared at her for a while before taking out a token. She said, “This is an entry token. You can leave the palace anytime you wish in the future. You will no longer be limited to once per month.”

Fu Rou asked curiously, “Are you not going to punish me?”

“You saved Grand Emperor, mine and Grand Prince Liang’s lives. This is a merit and not a crime, why should I punish you?” Empress Zhangsun looked at Fu Rou warmly. *Who wasn’t young and in love before?*

“But Sheng Chumu...”

“Is this related to Sheng Chumu?” Empress Zhangsun interrupted, “If anyone asks you anything about what happened, repeat what you told me to them.”

“May I be bold to ask Your Majesty why you forgave me?” Fu Rou boldly asked as she knew she broke the rules.

“I have forgiven a lot of people and most would celebrate their luck after thanking me profusely. You are the only one who asked me the reason why I forgive you.” Empress Zhangsun had a kind look in her eyes and explained, “That is because I am very glad that you have

returned.”

When Fu Rou walked out of Lizheng Palace, she suddenly felt someone staring at her. “Who’s there?”

“Sister-in-law.” Sheng Chuling revealed himself.

“Chuling, why have you secretly come to this place? This is not a place for you and you cannot walk around as you please. Be careful in case someone catches you.” Fu Rou knew that the palace had strict rules.

“I definitely had to come after I heard that you returned. Elder Brother is missing and my entire family is looking for him. He went to Cangshan Mountain to look for you and disappeared. Do you know where he is?”

“Chumu...” Fu Rou was just about to tell Sheng Chuling what happened when someone interrupted them.

“Fu Siyan.” Prince Zhou had been waiting outside Lizheng Palace and he saw Sheng Chuling. He immediately interrupted the two and turned to Sheng Chuling. “The guards patrol in groups. Why are you here alone?”

“I wanted to ask Fu Siyan whether she knew where Chumu was.” Sheng Chuling was loyal to his brother by standing on his side instead of Prince Zhou’s.

“What a joke. If you do not know where your elder brother is, why would Fu Siyan know?” Prince Zhou stared at Fu Rou knowingly, telling her not to reveal the truth.

Fu Rou also did not want to reveal too much in front of Prince Zhou and she informed Sheng Chuling, “I do not know where Chumu is, but I hope that he will return safely soon.”

Sheng Chuling did not understand her hidden meaning and left dejectedly.

“You have only passed the Empress’ test by walking out of Lizheng Palace safely.” Prince Zhou had his own selfish thoughts but he also

had Fu Rou in mind. He cautioned, “Remember, do not tell anyone about you and Sheng Chumu leaving Chang’an or you will be harming both yourself and him.”

Fu Rou was obviously aware of this. However, from Sheng Chuling’s actions, Sheng Chumu had not returned. She had not left for Chang’an much earlier than him, why was he so slow to return?

Court Lady

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Fu Yin wanted to ask Mo Li whether she had tidied Lu Qi's study room when she walked in. Although Mo Li was a new servant and was unfamiliar with things, she was very genuine and Fu Yin could get along well with her.

Mo Li quickly hid her hands behind her back and reported, "I cleaned everything and did not break anything."

Fu Yin had not noticed Mo Li's actions and she checked the room and praised, "Not bad. Everything is in place, you have improved."

With a smile, Mo Li walked out to get a tea pot.

Fu Yin sat down and a man entered with a letter. He claimed to be a subordinate under Lu Qi with an urgent letter for him. Fu Yin accepted the letter on his behalf and was just about to put it with his other documents when she saw a signature mark on the corner of the letter. She recalled Lu Qi telling her before that most letters with this mark was an urgent military matter. Fu Yin could not help tearing the letter carefully apart.

The letter reported that Hong Yide was with Yan Zifang and if they did not act quickly, the consequences to the Lu family would be severe.

With the letter in her hands, Fu Yin was extremely nervous. She lifted

her hands up and down repeatedly as she pondered over what she should do. Unconsciously, she rubbed her belly. Eventually, a cold glare passed through her eyes and she burned the letter. She had entered the Lu family with a resolve and would now honour it.

Suddenly, a roar of laughter came from outside the door.

“Fang Wuling thought that he could take advantage of me since I am not fully recovered. He challenged me to a fight and lost miserably. That brat’s waist is as thin as a pair of chopsticks. Even if I lost my two arms, I can also beat him.”

Lu Qi had returned.

Fu Yin maintained a calm face as she greeted him at the door. “You returned home so late but still challenged someone to a fight? Imperial Physician Zhang had already cautioned that you should rest more to fully recover.”

“Aiya, I have to listen to your nagging after going out for a whole day. But your voice is like birds chirping, it is so refreshing.” Lu Qi lifted Fu Yin off her feet and twirled her around.

Fu Yin was not in a good mood after what she had done. Sensing her mood, Lu Qi was concerned and immediately asked her what was wrong.

“With you around, who would dare to bully me?” Fu Yin forced a smile.

“Oh right, I brought something for you.” Lu Qi reached into his shirt and took out a box for her. He said, “This is a beauty cream that is popular in Chang’an. People said that youth would be eternal if you use it everyday. It is women’s favourite and the best gift a husband can give to his wife. With this, you can be my pretty lady forever.”

“Forever?” Fu Yin could not help feeling bitter as she repeated his words.

“Why do you look so unhappy? Laugh a bit. This precious thing was almost wiped off the shelves by Prince Han. Apparently Consort Han loves this and he buys it to make her happy. It wasn’t easy for me to

get this box.”

“...I am not worth you treating me so well.” *What has she become? A servant, a murderer who is going to continue to harm others?*

“Silly girl.” Lu Qi thought she was being humble and reassured, “I want to treat you well my whole life.” *She is the only one in his heart and she could make him happy.*

During the morning court session, the Emperor was having a splitting headache.

In the Cangshan Mountain case, Fan Zhang refused to confess although it had been proven that Hong Yide was the sender of a letter found during a search in Fan Zhang’s residence. On the other hand, Cao Yuan had admitted that he had not reported things properly to Lu Qi because they were on bad terms. But he denied colluding with Hong Yide. The case could not be concluded but because Fan Zhang and Cao Yuan were both implicated, so the position of Army Commander was empty and the Emperor did not have anyone suitable in mind.

The Emperor first asked Prince Zhou, who recommended Zhong Yutang. Empress Zhangsun had already warned the Crown Prince that he could not allow Zhong Yutang, a man biased towards Prince Zhou, to occupy the position. As such, he raised a past issue against Zhong Yutang and recommended Linghu Deguan instead.

The Emperor finally accepted the Crown Prince’s suggestion.

Prince Zhou observed the Crown Prince and Lu Yunji exchanging a look. He suddenly added, “From what I have investigated about Cangshan Mountain so far, it was committed by the rogue man Hong Yide. However, I remember that Duke Chen had reported that he killed Hong Yide before. How can a man be revived and appear in Chang’an to commit such a heinous act?”

Lu Yunji knelt down and admitted, “Your Majesty, I have committed a crime. In the past, I defeated Hong Yide’s rebel troops

and wiped the battlefield clean. I found Hong Yide's body but his face had been cut numerous times by a knife. But the corpse's body figure was similar to Hong Yide, he wore the same clothes and even had Hong Yide's identification tag on him. It appears now that Hong Yide had faked his death and I was foolish enough to fall into his trap and reported to Your Majesty that he was killed. Please punish me severely for my crimes!"

Grand Prince Liang accused, "Duke Chen, you are a meticulous man but you were tricked by Hong Yide. Who would believe your words? Perhaps you had not killed him but you were greedy and wanted to reap some benefits from the battle so you lied to His Majesty that you killed him to receive a promotion and rewards."

Prince Zhou was surprised to see the sudden rift between the Lu family and Grand Prince Liang.

Lu Qi quickly defended, "Your Highness, my father has already confessed his crimes to His Majesty. Why must you accuse us?"

Grand Prince Liang rebutted, "What is wrong with me accusing him? If you don't give me any face, I will not give you any either. What goes around comes around."

With hatred in his eyes, Lu Yunji bowed his head towards the Emperor and begged. "I have committed a crime. I am old and foolish and I could not even recognize a body. Please punish me Your Majesty."

Yan Zifang added, "Your Majesty, he is not foolish but a greedy man who wanted Hong Yide's wealth. He took Hong Yide's wealth for himself and took an unrecognizable corpse to fake Hong Yide's death."

Shocked, Lu Qi yelled, "Yan Zifang, do not accuse us of such nonsense!"

The Crown Prince was Prince Zhou's enemy and he naturally stood on the side of Lu Yunji. He pleaded, "Imperial Father, Yan Zifang has a grudge against Duke Chen and he is not an upright person as he was once a pirate. His words cannot be trusted. However, Duke Chen

is loyal and honest and he is a pillar of support for our country. If he is punished, it would demoralise other subjects.”

Yan Zifang was prepared and he said, “Hong Yide is my witness. He told me personally that Lu Yunji took his wealth and let him go in the past. The leak of the route taken at Cangshan Mountain was also revealed to him by one of Lu Yunji’s men. If Your Majesty does not believe me, you can interrogate Hong Yide who is locked in my residence. You can then decide what to do with Lu Yunji.”

Lu Yunji started to panic and anger filled his eyes. He swore, “The heavens is a witness to my loyalty. I was tricked by Hong Yide and did not collude with him. I fought against him numerous times on the battlefield and his hatred for me runs deep. He must want to destroy me.”

The Emperor no longer hesitated and he ordered men to capture Lu Yunji and Lu Qi. He then asked Prince Zhou to take charge of interrogating Hong Yide.

The Crown Prince could not accept this and he chimed in, “Imperial Father, this matter involves a loyal servant of our country. Prince Zhou is still young and inexperienced, I am afraid...”

The Emperor was already in a bad mood and he knew what the Crown Prince wanted. He snapped with impatience, “Afraid of what? Just because he is inexperienced, does that mean you are more capable than him?”

The Crown Prince did not dare to speak up further and he stared at Prince Han. Prince Han normally took a side stand for court matters and did not want to be involved in this matter. The Crown Prince was frustrated. Prince Han was normally clever with his words but he remained silent at such a critical moment. *How infuriating!*

Hmmm. Evil fighting against evil. Who will win?

I highly recommending watching episode 31 if you guys are confused. The drama does a better job organizing the sequence of events to prepare you to what's to come later!

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The Crown Prince was extremely angry after the court session. When he returned to the Eastern Palace, he was nagged at by Zhan Xuanzhi. Zhan Xuanzhi said that he should not be close to certain officials. Moreover, Zhan Xuanzhi claimed that he should not be biased to anyone before the truth is out and that he is unable to determine what is right and wrong.

The Crown Prince no longer wanted to put up with this person that always angled for compliments. He drove Zhan Xuanzhi away in a fury. However, he still felt depressed. Out of habit, he went to Chen Ji's tomb, wanting to talk about his worries. However, he caught sight of Sun Lingshu and quickly hid behind a tree.

"Chen Ji, I really regret what I have done. When you were alive, I despised you for getting in my way. Now that you are dead, I keep wishing that you would come back alive. Not for me, but for the Crown Prince. Ever since you died, I have never seen him laugh happily." Sun Lingshu's expression was sullen as she lit a joss stick and poured a cup of wine.

"Everyone thinks that it is glamorous being the Crown Princess. No one knows how I bear through each day. I only wish for a chance to tell the Crown Prince that I know my mistakes. I did not intend for Imperial Father to force the Crown Prince to take your life in Ganlou Palace. I only found out about it after. But I know that the Crown

Prince will never believe me. Why? Why is my fate like this? Can I never make amends for the unintentional mistake I made? I really want to be the Crown Prince's wife and spend my life with him. I want to help him bear children. Even if I have to go through suffering and go to the ends of the world, I want to follow him. Why can't he give me a chance?"

The Crown Prince was moved. He suddenly saw Sun Lingshu hold onto her belly and fall to the ground. He was startled and rushed to support her.

Although Sun Lingshu was surprised to see the Crown Prince, she pulled his sleeve. "Your Highness, my stomach hurts...my child..."

The Crown Prince shouted, "Men!" He had an ominous feeling and carried Sun Lingshu. "Don't be afraid, I am with you!"

Sun Lingshu relaxed and smiled as she held tightly onto the Crown Prince's neck. However, her expression changed from the sharp pain in her stomach.

The Crown Princess' sudden labour shocked Empress Zhangsun as she rushed over with Fu Rou. Unfortunately, the Crown Princess' midwife said that it was going to be difficult labour and she was torn on whether to save the mother or the child.

Empress Zhangsun did not hesitate. "The Imperial Grandson is more important."

The Crown Prince froze and rushed to say, "Imperial Mother..."

Empress Zhangsun waved. "Of course I wish for the Crown Princess to be safe. But when it comes to importance, Crown Prince, you must not be confused. The Eastern Palace needs your bloodline."

Shuangxi rushed out of the room and hugged the Crown Prince's leg, wailing. "Your Highness! We can't do that. If we want to protect the child and force the Crown Princess to give birth, she will die from blood loss! Your Highness, please be kind and save the Crown Princess! With every day you are a couple, you will have a hundred days of blessing! Your Highness! Please don't abandon the Crown

Princess!”

Empress Zhangsun fumed, “Impudent servant! How dare you interrupt!”

“Midwife, is there no way to protect both mother and child? She is my wife!”

Fu Rou suddenly interrupted, “Your Majesty, there is a way. Maybe we can try it.”

Sun Lingshu was oblivious to whatever was happening outside. She only felt as if she was drowning. Her body was clearly in pain but she did not even seem to have the strength to breathe. She did not know that giving birth was so scary and she had to fight for her life.

“Crown Princess...Crown Princess...”

The Crown Prince’s shout caused her to open her eyes as she finally saw him standing outside the window. He sounded so anxious when he called her. *Does that mean that he still cared for her a little?*

“Your Highness...” Sun Lingshu’s tears rolled down her face and into her hair. “I am afraid I am going to let you down...”

The Crown Prince looked anxious. “Don’t say such unlucky words. You are my wife. You have to accompany me till I am old.”

“To be able to hear Your Highness say this, I can die in contentment...” Sun Lingshu really wanted to live. She wanted to give birth to her child and live together with them.

“You are not allowed to die! I will accompany you. You are not allowed to die! You and my child will be safe!” The Crown Prince cried out emotionally.

Sun Lingshu’s vision became blurry as she saw a suspicious black figure behind the Crown Prince. She struggled to open her eyes and finally saw a masked man raising a dagger behind the Crown Prince, about to pierce it into the back of the Crown Prince’s heart.

“Careful!” She was so shocked that her soul seemed to disappear.

“Behind you...”

The Crown Prince shouted and disappeared from the window.

With this shock, Sun Lingshu suddenly has newfound energy as she took in big gulps of air and supported herself on her elbows, wanting to get up. She shouted, “Assassin!” In the moment, the pain that seemed to be taking her life disappear.

The midwife happily carried the newborn child. “The child is born! The child is born! Crown Princess, with your sudden strength, everything has succeeded!” She hit the child’s buttock and the child started crying.

The midwife exclaimed, “Congratulations, Crown Princess. Both you and your child are safe.”

Sun Lingshu was anxious. “The Crown Prince? How is the Crown Prince?”

“Crown Princess, you must have been startled, I am okay.” The Crown Prince walked in and sat by the bed. “That was to protect you and the child. We had no choice.”

Sun Lingshu sighed in relief and fell into the Crown Prince’s embrace as she took her son. “Your Highness, look. Doesn’t he look like you?”

The Crown Prince lightly held his son’s face. His voice was filled with warmth. “Yes he does. You have worked hard. From now on, I will not neglect you. The three of us will spend our future together.”

The Emperor was delighted to have a grandchild and hosted a family banquet. Everyone from the harem participated. During the banquet, the Empress said the child looked like the Emperor whereas the Emperor thought that the child looked like the Empress. Everyone said that the Imperial Grandchild looked smart and the entire atmosphere was joyful.

“Imperial Father, the Eastern Palace has such joyful news for the entire nation. Today is just the family banquet, the Imperial

Grandson's celebration must definitely be grander. I wonder if you have someone in mind to be in charge of this?" Prince Zhou suddenly brought up.

Empress Zhangsun was always on guard. "Prince Zhou is very thoughtful. But now you are busy with the monastery case, how will you afford time to handle the celebration?"

"This event will be huge. I am not talented but I wanted to suggest Prince Han." Prince Zhou had already guessed that this would happen and did not intend to inconvenience himself.

Prince Han was currently eating happily and he replied reasonably, "Imperial Father, my literature school is currently extremely busy. If I have to take out time to manage the celebration, I am afraid..."

The Crown Prince immediately became unhappy. *How can his own brother be so arrogant?*

Empress Zhangsun coughed. Prince Han did not notice the Crown Prince's expression but quickly understood his Imperial Mother's expression and immediately stopped talking.

Concubine Yan said, "Prince Han is brilliant and always interacts with scholars. With regard to the celebration, he would easily be able to find out the ancient traditions. He is a good choice."

The Emperor agreed with her logic. "Prince Han. This matter shall be assigned to you."

"Ah?" Prince Han was unwilling. "Mmhm, I accept your decree."

Empress Zhangsun continued, "Your Majesty, there is one more person that deserves merit for the successful birth of the Imperial Grandson, other than the Crown Princess. During the crisis, Fu Siyan suggested the method of fright to ensure the safety of both mother and child."

"Oh? Fu Siyan, you did well." The Emperor has heard of Fu Rou's numerous contributions. "Before this, you bravely charged through Cangshan Mountain and used a cloth to map out the position of the stone room. You saved the Grand Emperor and Empress. This time,

you saved the Crown Princess and my Imperial Grandson. How should I reward you?"

Fu Rou stepped forward and spoke, "It is my duty to share your worries."

"Your words remind me of Zhan Xuanzhi. You are a palace lady yet you know how to help me share my worries. Very good, you have the spirit of a man. However, I have to reward you for your contribution. Tell me, what would you like?"

Fu Rou fell silent for a while. "If Your Majesty really wishes to reward me, then I do have something. In Guangxi's Lion Mountain, there are bandits running wild and robbing citizens. They have caused families to be torn apart and become miserable. I wish that Your Majesty will dispatch troops to suppress the bandits so that the poor citizens can return to the homes and be reunited."

"I understand." The Emperor found it strange. "How do you know about bandits in Guangxi's Lion Mountain?"

"I met a grandfather and his granddaughter on my way and heard from them."

Empress Zhangsun added, "Your Majesty, Fu Siyan saw and heard many things when she was out of the palace."

The Emperor continued, "Fu Siyan, why have you never mentioned this before?"

Fu Rou replied calmly, "In front of the Emperor, I should not speak without a decree."

Li Shimin suddenly laughed, "I know what to reward you with now. Since you are a Siyan, I shall reward you with the power to speak. In the future, you are allowed to speak in front of me."

Seeing how Fu Rou was frozen, Empress Zhangsun smiled. "His Majesty is treating you favourably, aren't you going to thank him?"

Fu Rou kneeled to thank him. "Thank you for your grace, Your Majesty."

Speaking in front of the Emperor? This reward is huge!

Court Lady

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With Lu Yunji and Lu Qi eating prison food for the second time, it made the people in their residence disorganized. They were all wondering if they should run away. Lu Yingying turned a deaf ear as she entered Lu Qi's study room and saw Fu Yin looking depressed. She was staring blankly at a picture that Lu Qi drew previously.

"Now you are looking sullen. Are you regretting it now? When you killed my cousin, did you think of today? If Lu Hanxing were still alive, he would be running around for Father and Elder Brother, trying to pull relations." She thought that Fu Yin regretted killing Lu Hanxing.

Although Fu Yin pulled herself back to reality, her gaze was still dull. "I do not regret killing Lu Hanxing. You will not understand my sorrow."

"I truly did not see how evil you were." Lu Yingying's face was frosty. "I also do not want to understand what a murderer thinks. I came to see my future nephew."

She walked in front of Fu Yin and bent down, she spoke gently to the small bump, "Good nephew, don't be afraid. You still have me, your aunty. I will make sure you get to see your father and grandfather."

Fu Yin could not resist asking, "What do you intend to do?"

Lu Yingying ignored her as she stood up to leave. It was just words. After she walked out of the study room and the Lu Residence, she was at a loss of where to start. She knew she could not use the same method of begging the Emperor to forgive them.

A resounding laughter filled the air. It made Lu Yingying think that it was really a few houses that were happy while a few were suffering. She followed the sound and looked and felt even more offended. Yan Zifang was drinking with his group. They were eating heartily and laughing. One look and she knew they were celebrating the fall of her household. She continued staring straight at them and eventually caught Yan Zifang's eye.

Yan Zifang looked coldly at her for a while before walking up to her. "What are you doing here?"

"I am here to save my father and brother." She wanted to ask if he could help her.

"I already said that we do not owe each other. Who you want to save has nothing to do with me. You can't be hoping that I save your father and brother right? That would be a joke. You should know that I was the one that caught Hong Yide."

He did not understand her just like how she did not understand him. They should not mix.

"That's right, we are strangers with no connection to each other. I was foolish." Lu Yingying turned to leave. Suddenly, she turned back. "Yan Zifang, no matter how many obstacles one has gone through and how emotionless one has become, there should still be a soft spot in your heart. Previously, I was gullible and thought that I could find that soft spot for you."

"You are indeed gullible. You only know how to ask me to be kinder but don't know how to convince your father and brother to do less evil." *Does it mean that kind people should be bullied by the evil ones?*

"I believe that everyone is kind and that everyone has a nice side.

Even my father and brother are not bad beyond repair. In my eyes, this world is much brighter and more beautiful than the world in your eyes. Yan Zifang, I pity you.” Lu Yingying walked off.

Yan Zifang was stunned. No one has seen how difficult it was for him to live. Even Fu Rou could not see it. Only her, Lu Yingying, saw through him. He was indeed pitiful.

Prince Han tossed and turned slowly as he woke up. He had a splitting headache. As he saw Consort Han embroider next to him, he could not help but relax.

“You are awake? Does your head hurt? Next time when the Crown Prince asks you to drink, you should not just accept them all foolishly. If you can decline, you should decline.” Recently, the Crown Prince had gotten slightly distant from Prince Han and they could not invite him over. However, in the past few days, he kept asking Prince Han out for drinks. Anyone could tell that the Crown Prince was in a good mood.

Prince Han did not comment and simply asked what she was embroidering.

Consort Han’s expression was slightly awkward as she wanted to hide it. Prince Han sat up and took the embroidery. There was a hundred children on it.

“The Crown Princess works hard and it has only been a short while since she entered the palace and she already gave birth to an Imperial Grandson for Imperial Mother. Compared to her, I...” Consort Han felt bitter.

“You can’t compare these kinds of things.” Prince Han did not allow her to continue.

“Although that’s what we say, who doesn’t know how Imperial Mother feels. Even I feel like I have let you down.” Her deepest anxiety was not having any sons.

“You are still young and I am still strong. We will soon have sons. I

just can't bear to see you look so depressed." In his life, he only enjoyed two things. The first was eating and the second was his wife.

"He who gives no thought to far-flung problems soon finds suffering nearby. Now I only have two things on my mind. The first is to bear you a son and the second is Chumu; he makes me worry incessantly--"

Before she could finish her sentence, their attendant announced that Sheng Chumu had returned.

Consort Han was pleasantly surprised. However, she did not expect her brother, who had gone missing for some time, would be vomiting and smelling of alcohol as soon as he returned.

"What's wrong with this family? Is alcoholism infectious? Everyone's the same." She glared at Prince Han.

Prince Han hurried to find a scapegoat. "That's right, Chumu. If you can't drink then don't drink. What if you get ill from this? You are disappointing. You went missing for no reason. Did you know how worried your sister was? You are a general and cannot leave your position as you wish. If Sheng Chuling did not personally come to beg me and I went to apply leave for you, I am afraid that your position would have..."

"That's enough. Can't you see that he is drunk? How can he understand you? Hurry and help him into the guest room." In the end, her heart ached for her younger brother. She did not know what he had suffered outside.

When Sheng Chumu was settled, Consort Han went to make a hangover soup. Prince Han wanted to follow her but was held back by Sheng Chumu.

"Don't go, you are not allowed to leave!" Sheng Chumu's eyes were hazy and he could not see who was in front of him. "I gave up everything for you. Why do you still want to leave? That day, the bun that I bought for you was still hot but you stepped over my heart. Touch it..."

Prince Han's eyes jutted out as he struggled to pull back his hand. "I am not touching!"

"Why do you always let me down? If you don't care about me, why would you give me hope. Why did you make me think that you were willing to grow old with me?" He was determined not to let go.

"You are worse than me when I am drunk!" Prince Han wanted to laugh and cry.

"I can't believe your smooth hand would crush my heart." He rubbed his cheek on Prince Han's plump hand. "When I wake up, I won't be so stupid anymore. With this last kiss, let's end the feelings we have for each other."

Prince Han did not have time to react before Sheng Chumu planted a kiss on the back of his hand. Of all things, Consort Han caught sight of this.

Consort Han was shocked. "What is going on?"

"Consort, don't misunderstand." *No wonder Sheng Chumu managed to go through all the pretty women in Chang'an. He was skilled in this.* Prince Han pulled his hand back and wiped the back of his hand. He was so cheesy. "He is too drunk and cannot recognise anybody. He said a bunch of things and then...did that."

"He is drunk but you are not drunk. You let him do his nonsense." Consort Han thought it was hilarious.

"Who asked for him to be your dear brother. I have no choice but to give in to him." Prince Han lowered his voice, "From what I see, he must have gotten his heart broken by some women. Okay, who cares about his nonsense. Now that he is back, everything will be much easier."

"That's right. As long as he has returned safely." As Consort Han spoke, she suddenly saw Sheng Xiaojing poke his head through the door. "Aiyu, father. You should make a sound. You scared me. Why are you here?"

"I received the news that you sent. How can I not come?" Sheng

Xiaojing looked at his eldest son who was in deep sleep. He breathed a sigh of relief. "Stupid brat, when he wakes up tomorrow, I am going to break his legs!"

"Okay, you can scold and hit him all you want as long as you wait for Chumu to leave my Han Mansion." Consort Han was a filial eldest daughter as well as a protective sister.

Sheng Chuling and Sheng Chujun accompanied their father and could tell that he did not mean what he said and they laughed secretly.

Sheng Xiaojing suddenly turned around. "What are you laughing at? Brats, remember to tell your mother that Chumu has returned from his travels. No one is allowed to let your mother know that there was no news of Chumu for a period of time. If not, she will cry out for the heavens and earth to hear. Sigh, a kind mother begets many failures of sons."

Prince Han looked at this family and laughed foolishly.

There was a new courtesan at Swallow House. This news attracted a pack of wolves and Grand Prince Liang headed the pack. The beauty went on stage with a white muslin cloth covering her face. Her figure was enchanting and she danced like a fairy. She attracted everyone's souls. The pack of wolves hooted and clapped. When it was time to win the beauty over, she walked in front of Grand Prince Liang and kneeled.

"I am here to seek forgiveness from Your Highness." The beauty had glorious and brilliant eyes. "I was fortunate to meet Your Highness on Chang'an's streets before. Your Highness was confident and at ease, making me admire you. When I got home, I mentioned to my elder brother that I coincidentally bumped into a hero on the streets. However, I was shy and did not mention your identity. Unexpectedly, just because my elder brother heard what I said, he believed that my heart was with the hero and rejected all marriage requests for me."

"It was right to reject the marriages." Grand Prince Liang has had an uncountable number of affairs and could not remember who this lady

was. However, his eyes lit up. "Since I intend to take in a concubine, you will be happiest with me."

"However, the person that got rejected is angry. I am thinking of a way to appease him. That's why I came to Swallow House to show my talents and make him smile." The beauty removed her muslin cloth and exposed an extraordinary beauty. It was Lu Yingying. "That person is Your Highness."

"It is you!" Grand Prince Liang's smile turned cold. "Lu Qi dotes on you and looks down on me as a brother-in-law."

"That day when my brother came back, he told me that he rejected your kind intentions. I was anxious and did not know what to do. I didn't explain myself to you and was afraid that you would misunderstand me and my brother. I wanted to find you but could not go without a reason. Today, I am here to seek forgiveness." She was left with no choice but to head into the lion's den.

"No wonder Lu Qi did not give me face that day. He had done it because you already had a man in your heart. But you actually liked me." So Lu Yingying had actually set her eyes on him. Grand Prince Liang became proud. "Haha, what a misunderstanding! Lu Yingying, do you really like me or are you trying to use your beauty to seduce me to save your father and brother?"

"I do not dare to lie. Both are my reasons." She knew the consequence of lying.

Grand Prince Liang was not annoyed. "What a great two reasons."

"Although I admire Your Highness, I cannot give up my duty to my parents and kinship with my brother. As long as Your Highness graces us with kindness and saves my father and brother, I will be willing to be your servant and serve Your Highness."

"For a daughter of a Duke to be my servant, it is a pity. I wanted to raise your status and make you my consort. Unfortunately, you don't have the blessing." Grand Prince Liang held Lu Yingying's chin as he looked lecherously at her appearance. "With your beauty, you can be my concubine. If you treat me well, I will not neglect you." As he said

this, he reached out for her waist and led her away.

Lu Yingying pulled herself away and spoke nicely, “Your Highness, even if I am just a concubine. My father and brother should be the ones to send me off.”

“...I understand.” She made it clear that she was sacrificing her beauty for him to save her family. She was not willing to go without benefitting first. “Okay. On the day that your father and brother return home, you will become my concubine.”

Grand Prince Liang laughed boisterously.

Lu Yingying stood there silently, her eyes lowered. She was like a statue.

The part with Chumu and Prince Han was so cute. Haha.

Court Lady

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The Emperor recalled that Prince Qin's tutor was on leave and was worried that Prince Qin would slack off. He decided to spring a surprise check. When he reached the palace entrance, he saw Fu Rou telling Prince Qin a story. Prince Qin and Xinnan were both extremely absorbed in her story.

“During the Warring States Period, Wei Wenhou was the emperor of Wei Kingdom. One day, during a court session, Wei Wenhou asked his ministers what kind of emperor was he? His ministers replied that he was a benevolent emperor. There were also some that held a different opinion. A minister named Ren Zuo came up and spoke to Wei Wenhou. He asked the emperor why he did not bestow Zhongshan Country, which the emperor had just obtained, to his brother and instead gave it to his son. What kind of benevolent emperor was he? When Wei Wenhou heard this, he was furious. As soon as Ren Zuo realised the situation was not right, he hurried and left. Wei Wenhou got even angrier and vented his anger on the remaining ministers. He saw Di Huang standing among his ministers and pointed him out. Wei Wenhou asked him. What kind of emperor am I?” Fu Rou paused as she reached this point.

“Fu Siyan, why did you stop talking? How did Di Huang reply?” Prince Qin was very interested and rushed to ask her.

“Your Highness, when listening to stories, you must think. If you just

listen without thinking, you won't benefit from listening. I wanted to ask. If both of you were Di Huang, how would you reply Wei Wenhou?"

Xinnan immediately answered, "Is there a need to ask? At this point in time, you can't dash out and be the scapegoat. He should say that Wei Wenhou was a benevolent leader like everyone else. There is no need to risk his life."

Prince Qin objected, "That's not right. The ministers receive their salary from the emperor and they should be devoted to him. The duty of ministers is to aid the emperor. When they see something wrong, they have to stand out and say it. If Di Huang is a loyal minister, he should speak the truth and point out what Wei Wenhou has done wrong. Even if he offends Wei Wenhou and is punished, he should not disregard his character as a minister."

"Both Your Highnesses have your own points." Fu Rou smiled. "Di Huang replied to Wei Wenhou and said he was a benevolent Emperor. Wei Wenhou's fury subsided by half and was even slightly proud. He could not help but ask. *Di Huang, how do you know that I am a benevolent emperor?* Du Huang replied, *I heard that only when an emperor is benevolent, then would his subjects dare to speak their mind. Just now, Ren Zuo was bold and said such honest words to you. That's when I knew that you are a benevolent emperor.* When Wei Wenhou heard this, he came to a realisation and hurriedly asked Di Huang to chase after Ren Zuo. When Ren Zuo returned, Wei Wenhou personally got off his seat to welcome Ren Zuo and treated Ren Zuo as the guest of honor."

Prince Qin had an expression as if he realised something. "Wei Wenhou should treat Di Huang as the guest of honor. Di Huang is the loyal and capable minister."

"That's right. Wei Wenhou naturally also rewarded Di Huang. He appointed Di Huang as a minister and started the century of rule in the Wei Kingdom. Wei Wenhou became one of the most accomplished leaders in the Warring States Period. Hence, only when you are able to discern talent and take advice then will you be able to bring blessings to the common people and gain favors from everywhere."

As the Emperor heard Fu Rou speak till this point, he walked in and praised her. “Xinnan, Prince Qin, Grand Emperor is not feeling well, don’t forget to visit him. As children, being filial is the most important thing. From now on, Fu Siyan should also tell you stories on filial piety.”

Xinnan and Prince Qin immediately understood and went to see the Grand Emperor.

Li Shimin smiled at Fu Rou. “A person will say things depending on what kind of experience and frame of mind one has. Prince Qin is still young and Xinnan is headstrong. If you are able to guide them, I will be able to be rest assured. Prince Qin’s tutor is on a two month leave. Even after he returns, you should not relax and continue to urge Prince Qin. It looks like he really listens to you.”

“His Highness, Prince Qin just likes to listen to me tell stories.” Fu Rou did not dare to flaunt.

“The principles of the world are hidden amongst stories. You can just tell him stories.” As long as people enjoyed listening, it was good enough.

At this moment, an internal attendant came in to report that Sheng Chumu had returned to Chang’an and was seeking an audience at Ganlou Palace. Fu Rou had been thinking about him day and night and she could finally be at peace.

The Emperor saw Fu Rou’s expression change. “Sheng Chumu went to find you by the Empress’ decree. In the end, you are already back but he took so long to return. Fu Siyan, how about you follow me to see what he has to say?”

Fu Rou did not reject. Even if she could not talk to him, seeing him was good enough.

Fu Rou followed the Emperor to Ganlou Palace. She saw that Prince Han, Prince Zhou and Yan Zifang were there as well. Finally, she caught sight of Sheng Chumu. She smiled at him but he looked at her coldly and did not spare her a second glance. Her heart froze but she cheered herself up. As long as she explained herself to him,

everything will be back to normal.

The Emperor spoke, “Sheng Chumu, I wanted to evaluate the merit of your actions and reward you but you were nowhere to be found. You are the first person that has been in this situation. You have finally returned?”

Sheng Chumu kneeled. “My apologies.”

Prince Han specially came to speak up for him. “Imperial Father, Sheng Chumu had no choice. Do you recall his unmentionable disease? He heard that there was a highly-capable person that had a spiritual medicine to cure his disease. However, this worldly person’s whereabouts are difficult to locate. We finally got a trace of him and Sheng Chumu had to rush to find him. This concerns his lifetime of happiness. Because of this, I specifically requested leave for him.”

The Emperor nodded. “Since it is to cure an illness, it is understandable.”

“Imperial Father, in the Cangshan case, Sheng Chumu rescued the Grand Emperor and Empress while Yan Zifang captured Hong Yide. They are young but have contributed greatly to court all because Imperial Father is brilliant.” Prince Zhou was partial.

“Prince Zhou, half of what you just said was to make me happy while the other half touched on all the relevant points. What heartened me most is the fact that they are young. Although the old ministers have military achievements for all to see, the young ones have also demonstrated their abilities. The court has a pool of young and vigorous generals. Very good. Yan Zifang.”

Yan Zifang kneeled. “Here.”

“You captured Hong Yide and demonstrated your abilities. Heed my decree, Yan Zifang shall be awarded with a thousand pieces of gold, a sword and one Ruyi Scepter. He shall be promoted by one rank and defend the west city. You shall be in charge of law and order in Chang’an west city and arrest thieves and bandits.” With all personnel present, the Emperor rewarded him.

“Thank you, Your Majesty!” Yan Zifang kowtowed. He finally had authority.

“Sheng Chumu. You saved my father and my wife. I haven’t decided on how to reward you.”

Prince Han took the opportunity. “Imperial Father, this is a huge achievement. You cannot be stingy.”

“You are speaking for your brother-in-law again. Okay I will be generous.” The Emperor smiled. “Sheng Chumu, tell me what you wish for.” Even if it was love, the Emperor would give it to him.

Prince Han whispered to Sheng Chumu, “This is your chance to get the woman you love. You can’t miss this opportunity, it will not come again.”

Sheng Chumu was expressionless. “Your Majesty, I would like a chance to render my service to the country. I want to leave Chang’an and protect the borders.”

Prince Zhou and Yan Zifang were surprised. They had thought that he would definitely ask for Fu Rou. They never thought that he would give up such a good opportunity.

“Sheng Chumu, are you okay?” *What kind of situation was this? Protect the borders? If his consort were to know about this, she would throttle him!* Prince Han stopped him. “Imperial Father, he must be overjoyed and is talking nonsense.”

“No, I am not delusional. In the past, I believed that the most important thing was romance. Now I have realised that love is just an unrealistic rosy picture. From today onwards, I am cutting off everything of the past. I am willing to go to the bitter-cold borders to strengthen my resolve and repay Your Majesty’s benevolence. I will bring honour to my family.” *He was going to put the past behind him and start again!*

Fu Rou never expected Sheng Chumu to misunderstand her so deeply and not even give her a chance to explain. He was going to leave once and for all.

“Since that is the case, I will allow it. Sheng Chumu, today Fu Siyan’s story surprised me. Now, you do not want rewards and even volunteered for military service. I am very happy today.” The Emperor would naturally not know about the reason behind it. He only cared about this great result.

While the Emperor was delighted, the people that left Ganlou Palace had mixed expressions.

Prince Han pinched Sheng Chumu. “Are you crazy? The border is a cold and bitter place. Is it even a place for humans? Why are you making things difficult for yourself?”

Sheng Chumu was indifferent as he walked past Fu Rou without glancing at her.

Prince Han glanced at Fu Rou before sighing. He chased after Sheng Chumu and shouted, “Not only are you harming yourself, you are implicating me as well. If your sister finds out that you want to go to the border and I did not stop you, she will take it out on me when I return.”

Prince Zhou walked behind Fu Rou and asked. “Do you regret it? Exposing your identity that day?”

Fu Rou looked at Sheng Chumu’s back view. He was determined to leave. Although she was heartbroken, she did not want others to see. “Should I regret?”

Prince Zhou’s tone changed to one of delight. “Maybe it is a good thing. Didn’t you like someone with a sense of responsibility and an indomitable spirit? With this, Sheng Chumu actually feels like a hero. It is much better than when he pesters you and forces you to abandon your family and duty.”

Fu Rou could not control herself and flared up. “You are mocking someone when they are already feeling down.”

Prince Zhou smiled once again. “Someone is not in the best mood now. I think I better make myself scarce.” *With someone leaving on*

their own accord, he had ample time in the future.

When Fu Rou looked in the direction Sheng Chumu had left once again, he was already gone.

“I am sorry.” Yan Zifang walked up to her.

“A simple apology cannot make up for what you did.” No one could force her to lie about her own feelings. It didn’t matter whether Sheng Chumu misunderstood or not, it was not for a third party to interfere.

“Then why didn’t you report me? I hid news about Hong Yide and even kidnapped you.” If she had spoken the truth, he wouldn’t have gotten a promotion or rewarded. Perhaps, he would have even lost his life.

“I promised the person that rescued me to keep it a secret.” It was not because of their past.

Yan Zifang froze. “Lu Yingying?”

“I know that you hate Lu Yunji but Lu Yingying is innocent. Even if you cannot treat her well, you should at least not hurt her.” Based on her woman’s intuition, she could sense an ambiguous sentiment between the two of them. “Yan Zifang, what you cannot let go of is a mirage of your childhood. Don’t miss the opportunity to be with someone in front of you just because of it.”

Yan Zifang remained silent and watched Fu Rou walk off.

Chumu is so foolish. Aaaiii.

Court Lady

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On this day, Sun Lingwei arrived at Fuan Temple to repay her wish. The previous time she came, although she did not manage to get a charm, she got a very auspicious item and it worked pretty well. Today, her elder sister had given birth to an Imperial Grandson and her relationship with the Crown Prince had been mended. Sun Lingwei's relationship with Sun Lingshu was also better now and Sun Lingwei could enter the palace frequently.

She sent her maid, Guiyuan, away to buy some incense while she walked and looked around the temple. She slowly walked to the tree which she had cried under after she did not manage to buy a charm the previous time.

"Are you looking for me?" Someone jumped out from the tree with a mischievous smile on his face. He was charming and made people like him. He was the Sheng family's third son, Sheng Chujun.

Sun Lingwei's eyes lit up but her words went against her heart. "Who is looking for you? But you came at the right time."

Sheng Chujun's lips were about to tear open from how wide his smile was. "I know. The wish that you made..."

"Mmhm, it came true." She was still thankful to him. "That unique peace knot was very useful. My elder sister gave birth to a son and now my brother-in-law is very gentle and caring towards her. She is

no longer angry with me and treats me very well...oh right. Let me return this peace knot to you.”

“Since I gave it to you, it is yours. Why are you returning it to me?”
How can someone take back a love token? “Is your surname Sun?”

Sun Lingwei found it strange. “How did you know?”

“What kind of person am I? To find out the name of a pretty lady in Chang’an...” He kept himself in check. He did not want to scare her away. “Mmhm, it is rare to have a lady from a wealthy family. I know you are called Sun Lingwei. You are the daughter of Minister Sun Tan. Your sister is the Crown Princess.”

“You are amazing. You know everything.” She gasped.

“I also know that in five days, you will come back to Fuan Temple to pray for your parents.” *The most important thing is to set up their next meeting.*

“I do not intend to come back in five days.” She did not react.

“You will definitely come. Because in five days, I will wait here for you.”

She answered seriously, “No.”

“Why not?” He guided patiently.

“It is not proper etiquette.” She was a very filial daughter.

“You are a daughter. Why is it not proper etiquette to pray for your parents? It is filial piety. As for me, I am also praying for my parents. It is very proper.” He was also a filial son.

“You make sense...” But something did not seem right.

He continued to push. “You are a filial daughter, I am a filial son. We bump into each other here and pray for our parents together. We talk to each other and hold hands. It is alright. As the saying goes, the environment and nurture determines a person’s character. We are all good and filial people. We should become closer and become good

friends so we can influence each other to become better people. Don't you think?"

She nodded, not finding anything wrong with what he said.

"Moreover, aren't I your benefactor? I even gave you the most valuable peace knot made by the Sheng family. Listening to me is a way of paying back my kindness. Your parents should have taught you that people need to repay other people's kindness, right?"

"Mmhm." She nodded heavily.

"You are too obedient." *He was so lucky.*

His elder brother had gotten a female tigress. His second brother got a stubborn princess. Only he managed to find an obedient little cat. His lifetime of happiness was about to start.

Grand Prince Liang was full of expectations as he rushed into the Eastern Palace to look for the Crown Prince. Initially, he had just planned on going to the Imperial Prison to find the Lu father and son. After all, he had promised Lu Yingying. Although he had no way of turning the case over, he could at least bring them a good meal and some drinks. Who would have known that he would obtain a vital piece of information on his trip.

Grand Prince Liang was bashing his way through and almost knocked Fu Rou over. She hurried and moved to the side. Although Master Yuan had helped her to cut off her ill-fate with this prince, he was not a life-saving talisman.

"Wait!" Grand Prince Liang shouted at her.

Her gaze became guarded. "What instructions does Your Highness have?"

"That day where I was poisoned in the Death Maze, I heard that you used a medicinal pill from Priest Sun to save me?" *Was she guarding against him? What a pity that he had changed his target.*

“It was convenient. Your Highness does not have to be concerned.”
Could it be that he wanted to thank her?

“Of course I am concerned. It is rare that you have a pill that can revive a person. Since you have another, hurry and hand it over to me!” Seeing how her eyes widened and stared at him, he continued, “What are you doing? Do you understand the difference between ranks? Anything good should be given to the person of higher rank. You are a despicable person, unworthy of it!”

Fu Rou bit her lip. Sheng Chumu had requested to be sent to the borders, she was thinking of giving it to him.

“Speaking of which, I still miss your scent, if you don’t hand it over to me obediently...” He laughed devilishly and made a move beside her. Suddenly, a bottle appeared in front of him.

“Take it.” Her voice was icy. “I saved you out of kindness, yet you came back to bite me.”

He could hear the ridicule in her words but did not care. Besides, he had already gotten what he wanted. He was very busy and had no time to deal with a palace lady.

Initially, the Crown Prince was not happy to see Grand Prince Liang. It was only until Grand Prince Liang told him that Hong Yide had only been willing to confess to the Crown Prince but Prince Zhou had hid this news.

Grand Prince Liang was arrogant. “I spent quite a lot of effort to obtain this news. Prince Zhou is watching Hong Yide tightly and is interrogating him day and night. However, Hong Yide is not willing to confess. He said that other than the Crown Prince, he does not trust anyone. Crown Prince, if you do not interfere in this huge case, all the credit will go to Prince Zhou. Moreover, Prince Zhou is currently dominating the situation. Who knows if whatever he finds is the truth or not? Lu Yunji has always been close to Your Highness. If Prince Zhou takes this chance to set Lu Yunji up and pull you under water as well...”

The Crown Prince froze. “I will not give him the opportunity.”

Grand Prince Liang took the chance to get closer. “Your Highness is brilliant.”

“You cannot underestimate Prince Zhou. He used this Cangshan case to get rid of Caoyuan and Fan Zhang. He just wants to promote Zhong Yutang and obtain control of the Imperial Guards. Thankfully, I saw through his plan and impeached Zhong Yutang in time. I have just managed to gain control of the Imperial Guards.”

The Crown Prince fell silent. “I have to meet Hong Yide but I cannot let Prince Zhou find out.”

“Crown Prince, please go ahead. I have established a critical relationship and will follow you from now on.” Grand Prince Liang had made up his mind.

Very soon, the Crown Prince reached the prison where Hong Yide was captured. As he smelt the scent of the prison, he could not help but cover his nose. He did not notice a fierce look cross Hong Yide’s face.

“Your Highness, you are finally here.” *Li Shimin’s Crown Prince was too stupid.*

“You are only willing to confess to me. How can I not come? You should be very satisfied that I am here.”

“But do you know why I want you to come?”

Because after the failure on Cangshan Mountain, Hong Yide understood that just based on his power alone he could never hurt Great Tang’s Emperor. But he could join the overflowing water that was spreading before the huge storm. With his life, he was going to use it like how mayflies can shake a huge tree. He was going to use the might of others to achieve his goals. Moreover, he still had a grandson, the remaining bloodline of the Hong family. He had to sacrifice all to protect him.

“I am more powerful than Prince Zhou, so you can trust me. If you tell me the truth, I can speak up for you in front of Imperial Father. Perhaps you will have a chance to live.” Whatever the Crown Prince

guessed was completely off.

“A chance to live?” No no, he was definitely going to die. But he could not let his death go to waste. “I have an absolutely irreconcilable animosity with Li Shimin. Unfortunately, I am incapable and cannot kill Li Shimin. I was also unable to kill Li Shimin’s father and wife. However, if I am able to hurt his Crown Prince, my trip to the Justice Office will not be a waste.”

“What are you saying?” The Crown Prince was startled as he took a step back. However, since Hong Yide was tightly bound by chains, he believed that he was just trying to scare him. “Your hands are bound and you can’t even scratch your own head. How dare you think of hurting me?”

“Hurting you is easier than scratching my head.” Hong Yide suddenly bit down sharply on his tongue and black-coloured blood splattered out from his mouth. With his last bit of energy, he shouted, “Guards, guards. Hurry---”

The guards outside ran in. As they saw Hong Yide, they were shocked and rushed forward to check whether he was still breathing. Hong Yide was already dead.

The Crown Prince was a fool.

Dun dun dun...

Court Lady

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Moonlight shone on a pavilion. It was General Zhenhai's pavilion. There were two people in the pavilion. One of them was Yan Zifang, who had just obtained his authority. The other man was someone that looked like Chen Ji, Fu Shui.

"I thought that heaven had sent me a god that did not need repayment to help me avenge my parents. Now I know. You handed Hong Yide to me, not for me to deal with Lu Yunji, but to deal with the Crown Prince." Yan Zifang poured himself a cup of wine.

"Where is Lu Yunji now?" Fu Shui laughed lightly as he poured himself a cup as well.

"Justice Office's Prison." Yan Zifang replied.

"Then it works out." *The end result was the most important.*

"Who exactly are you?" Yan Zifang asked.

"Didn't I tell you? My name is Fu Shui. The Fu Shui in Fu Shui Nan Shou (覆水难收 which means there is no use in crying over spilt milk.)." His name even had a deeper meaning.

"Why did you use Hong Yide to harm the Crown Prince?" Yan Zifang asked once more.

"I don't like him." *He was being ambiguous once again.*

Yan Zifang could sense it but did not give up easily. "There are so many officials in the entire Chang'an. You could have handed Hong Yide to anyone and they would be able to gain credit. Why did you choose me?"

Fu Shui thought about it. "Because we are the same kind of people."

Yan Zifang was curious. "What do you mean?"

Fu Shui smiled. "We're fugitives."

"Every time I ask you a question, your reply is even more difficult to comprehend than a fortune-teller. You are so secretive, how can we be good friends?" Yan Zifang quite admired him.

"Are we considered friends?" Fu Shui was mildly surprised. `

"You handed Hong Yide to me and helped me obtain a thousand gold pieces and a sword. I have been promoted to take charge of Chang'an West City. You invited me to drink such a rich imperial wine. In my eyes, we are considered friends." *No matter what the other person's real intentions were.*

Smiling, Fu Shui lifted his cup and knocked Yan Zifang's cup and downed the drink.

Under the clear and refreshing autumn weather, a flock of wild goose flew south.

Fu Rou walked towards Lizheng Palace. She was slightly inattentive. She heard Xinnan say that Sheng Chumu was about to set off on his journey today morning. Although Empress Zhangsun had given her a token to leave the palace, something happened to the Crown Prince the previous day. In a fury, the Emperor had locked him up in the Imperial Prison and the entire court had been shaken. At a time like this, as a Siyan, how could she leave the palace?

Sun Tan was crying and pleaded for the Crown Prince. Zhan Xuanzhi,

who had always been strict with the Crown Prince, was also against the imprisonment. Zhan Xuanzhi also mentioned that Prince Zhou should be removed from the investigation team. The Crown Prince was not part of the investigating team and should not have appeared in front of Hong Yide but everyone's attention was on Prince Zhou. They all believed that there was a conspiracy. However, this made the Emperor even angrier. It was clearly the Crown Prince acting on his own will yet Prince Zhou had been implicated. Only Prince Zhou was aware that this may not be as simple as Hong Yide's revenge. He recommended Fang Xuanling to take over the interrogation and the Emperor agreed.

Empress Zhangsun personally begged the Emperor to let the Crown Prince go but the Emperor resolutely rejected her. He felt that the Crown Prince's recent behavior was too disappointing. Empress Zhangsun then asked the Emperor if he wanted to dispose of the Crown Prince. The Emperor actually fell silent. It was rare that the relationship between the Emperor and Empress became frosty.

Fu Rou believed that Sheng Chumu would eventually understand her need and stubbornness to gain her own freedom properly was all for their lifetime of happiness. She even thought that it was the right time for him to leave. Ever since the Cangshan Mountain incident, she had an unknown intuition that an invisible whirlpool was growing bigger and bigger. If he was gone, at least she did not need to worry that he would be involved in it. It was a kind of blessing.

When Fu Rou entered Lizheng palace, there was no one else around. Even Wei Song was absent. Empress Zhangsun was seated by the window. She held a book in her hands but her gaze was looking out and her heart was far away. Fu Rou did not make a sound as she waited on quietly.

After a long while, Zhangsun sighed softly. "Do you know what book I am holding?"

"History of the Sui Dynasty." When Fu Rou entered, she caught sight of the book title.

"Sui Wendi established the Sui Dynasty and brought down the Chen Kingdom. He attacked the Turkic ethnic group and was named Sage

Khan. He saw the Spring and Autumn Annals as well as the ancient books of the Han Dynasty were destroyed during the war and gave an Imperial edict to request for books. With every book donated, he would give a set of tough silk fabric. Therefore, the Sui Dynasty collected a lot of books and had about three-hundred and seventy thousand books. Under his rule, the Sui Dynasty's territory expanded and consisted of over seven million households. Fu Siyan, what do you think of the founding emperor of the Sui Dynasty?"

"He had military might as well as intellect. He was a leader of great influence."

"The country was rich and powerful, why did their dynasty come to an end after two generations?" Zhangsun liked that Fu Rou was very knowledgeable and could have deep conversations with her.

"Because Emperor Yang of Sui was cruel." Everyone knew this. "Emperor Yang of Sui caused the citizens to suffer. An uncountable number of people lost their families because of him."

"You are wrong. That was Sui Wendi's mistake" Zhangsun shook her head. "Think about it. Who was Sui Wendi's first Crown Prince?"

"Yang Yong." Fu Rou recalled what was written in the book. "Yang Yong was Sui Wendi's first son. He was an eager learner and talented in poetry and speech. His personality was generous, warm and genuine. The book also wrote that he supported his kin and was sincere to his ministers. He was part of the military and helped build a strong foundation for the country for about twenty years. From what I can tell, his ability and experience in leading the country was pretty good."

Zhangsun praised, "Alas, you are an avid reader. In the harem, I am afraid that no palace lady can answer as well as you do. Yang Yong should have been the Sui Dynasty's second emperor. However, his younger brother, Yang Guang, was greedy and cruel. In front of his father, Sui Wendi, he was pretentious and tried to get on his good side. He continuously conspired against Yang Yong, resulting in Sui Wendi slowly disliking his eldest son. Eventually, Sui Wendi issued a decree to dispose of Yang Yong as the Crown Prince. He then gave the Crown Prince position to Yang Guang. Yang Yong felt indignant

and wanted to meet Sui Wendi to tell him of the injustice. However, Yang Guang always stopped him. Eventually, Yang Yong had no choice and in order to see his father for one last time, he climbed up a huge tree and shouted for Sui Wendi. When Sui Wendi heard Yang Yong shouting from a tree, Yang Guang's confidante, Yang Su, took the chance to defame Yang Yong. Yang Su claimed that Yang Yong had fallen into despair and was possessed by a demon. Sui Wendi believed him. Until the very end, Yang Yong never had the chance to meet Sui Wendi and explained his grievance. After Sui Wendi passed on, Yang Guang inherited the throne. The first thing he did was to kill Yang Yong. That was how the Sui Dynasty's previous Crown Prince was eventually killed."

Fu Rou exclaimed, "Father and son were tied by blood yet they could not even meet. Yang Yong is too pitiful."

"Is Yang Yong the only pitiful one?" Zhangsun sighed. "The numerous citizens were pitiful. At that time, the Sui Dynasty was rich and powerful, inviting all sorts of merchants and unique items. Their grain storage had so much reserves that it would last them for years. All these were destroyed after they landed in Yang Guang's hands. If Sui Wendi could have been more resolute and protected his Crown Prince, Yang Yong, and not listen to defamation, Yang Guang would not have become the Crown Prince. The world would then not have the cruel Emperor Yang of Sui. More than that, its people would not have fallen into such a tragedy. The position of Crown Prince is not just a household matter, it concerns the entire world and the future of Great Tang. At this very moment, Great Tang's Crown Prince is imprisoned, yet, I can only read the History of the Sui Dynasty and feel distressed."

Fu Rou persuaded her. "Your Majesty, the Emperor is a wise ruler."

"No matter how wise someone is, there are times where they are confused and need someone to give them advice. However, now he does not even want to listen to me. He simply thinks that I am covering up for my son. An overprotective mother will have failures for sons." Zhangsun knew that she could not speak hastily. If not, it would produce the opposite of what she wanted.

"Then..." Fu Rou paused. "Let him be the one that comes."

“This is a national affair, who dares to say more? Even if they dare, they will not be able to convince the ruler of the world.”

Sun Tan and Zhan Xuanzhi were ordered to be dragged out of this morning's court assembly by the Emperor.

“Maybe, there is someone.” Fu Rou thought of something.

Zhangsun's gaze was hopeful. “Who?”

The Crown Prince was kneeling in Lizheng Palace. When Fang Xuanling interrogated him, he refused to speak. The Emperor was furious and personally questioned him. However, he still refused to speak. When Hong Yide died, no one else was present at the scene and everything was blamed on him. Hence, no matter what he said now, people would think that he was giving excuses.

The Emperor called on Yan Zifang. “Ever since Hong Yide was locked in the Justice Office until his death, he never once confessed. You were the one that caught him, did he say anything to you?”

Yan Zifang replied, “Hong Yide said that he had been captured by Lu Yunji in the past and thought that he was destined to die. He never thought that Lu Yunji would be greedy and he was allowed to live when he gave Lu Yunji all his family's valuables. However, I do not know why Lu Yunji wanted to expose the route to Hong Yide. He also never mentioned what price he had to pay for the route. Hong Yide said that Lu Yunji asked his nephew, Lu Hanxing, to contact Hong Yide. Lu Hanxing was the one who gave Hong Yide the Empress' route back to Chang'an.”

Fang Xuanling intercepted, “When Lu Yunji and Lu Qi were locked up, Prince Zhou went to check on Lu Hanxing. Apparently, Lu Hanxing had a severe illness and died a few days before that.”

The Emperor sneered, “What a coincidental illness. His death is also too coincidental. Crown Prince, what do you think?”

The Crown Prince hesitated, “If Lu Yunji dares to conduct such disgraceful actions, I would request for Imperial Father to give me a

sword. I will personally behead Lu Yunji.”

“If he dares?” The Emperor was unhappy that the Crown Prince was biased towards the minister that he was closed to. “Even until now, you never forget to help speak up for Lu Yunji.”

“I have been framed and imprisoned. I understand the misery of coming up with many different excuses. Hence, I could not help but think that although Lu Yunji treats me well, he is first and foremost your minister. He is a Duke of Great Tang. If Lu Yunji has committed a crime, he should definitely be severely punished. But how can we determine Lu Yunji’s faults just based on what Yan Zifang has said? If it becomes an injustice, it will be a irrecoverable loss for Great Tang.”

The Emperor snorted, “You are already imprisoned. You should not speak without thinking.”

The Crown Prince rebutted, “Precisely so that is why I cannot remain silent.”

The Emperor’s expression became fierce. “Say that again?”

The Crown Prince was unafraid. “In the past, I had been dragged into Hong Yide’s case and told you my suspicions honestly. Now, I have been implicated once again. Am I supposed to give up what I truly think just to protect myself? Can being careful with my words ensure my life? I am your son and will not just resign to my fate. If Imperial Father wants to punish me for this, I am willing to accept the punishment.”

As the Emperor saw how unbending the Crown Prince was, he started to look at the Crown Prince differently and his expression softened.

Yan Zifang saw this and suddenly said, “Your Majesty, Hong Yide also said something else. However, it implicates the Crown Prince. I once had a personal animosity against Hong Yide and hesitated whether to say.”

The Emperor was serious. “This matter is serious. Quick say!”

“Hong Yide said that amongst his valuables, he had a pair of Green

Jade Dragon Ornaments from the Warring States Period. It is rare and extremely valuable. Lu Yunji specially took out the Green jade Dragon Ornaments and gave it to the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince really liked it and placed it in his study room...”

As Yan Zifang finished speaking, the Crown Prince was furious.

“Nonsense! Even if Hong Yide and Lu Yunji had an exchange, why would Lu Yunji mention me to him for no reason? My study room? Imperial Father, this is a premeditated conspiracy!”

Yan Zifang turned solemn. “I also did not believe Hong Yide. Like what the Crown Prince said, how would Hong Yide, this rebel, know anything about the Eastern Palace’s study room? Even if Lu Hanxing did not control his mouth and accidentally let slip when he met with Hong Yide, Lu Hanxing is just Lu Yunji’s nephew. How would he know the interactions between Lu Yunji and the Crown Prince?”

The Emperor immediately instructed Chief Cao to investigate the Eastern Palace’s study room.

Soon, Chief Cao walked in fearfully. He held two Green Jade Dragon Ornaments in a tray.

The Emperor was so angry he could not help but laugh. “No wonder Hong Yide had to die.”

The Crown Prince knelt. “Imperial Father! I have been wronged! These jade ornaments were indeed given to me by Lu Yunji, but I did not know...”

The Emperor pointed angrily at the Crown Prince as he raised his voice. “Men! Bring the Crown Prince...”

Fu Rou suddenly appeared. “Your Majesty, the Grand Emperor’s illness has taken a turn for the worse. He is asking for you.”

The Emperor was stunned as he rushed to see the Grand Emperor.

With the elder brother gone, the second brother took charge. After

Sheng Chuling played a filial son to his mother, he prepared to return to his room to sleep. However, he saw his third brother rummaging in his room like a thief.

He snuck up behind Sheng Chujun and pinched his ear. "You stinky brat. Elder Brother had just left and instead of studying or training, you learned to be a thief! This peace knot is for me to coax Xinnan. Hand it over!"

Sheng Chujun placed the peace knot in his clothes as he begged. "Second Brother, please have mercy! Princess Xinnan has already fallen for you. Even without the peace knot, she won't run away. I am different. I still have no signs of success and she begged me to give her another peace knot. How can I not give it to her? Second Brother, please help me."

Sheng Chuling made an *oh* sound as he became interested. "Who is she?"

"I can't tell you!" Sheng Chujun covered his own mouth. "Her family is very strict. If this is known, I will never get to see her ever again."

"Oh, it seems like you are serious this time. Okay, I will let you go." Sheng Chuling did not pursue further. After all, the three Sheng brothers were all unusually stubborn when it came to relationships.

Sheng Chujun broke into a smile. "Thank you, Second Brother!"

Sheng Chuling stuck out his palm. "Don't mention it, fifty taels."

Sheng Chujun cried out, "You want fifty taels for this broken thing? You are robbing!"

Sheng Chuling pinched his younger brother's ears once again. "The price has increased now. A hundred taels. Are you going to buy it or not? Return it if you are not buying it!"

Sheng Chujun gave a miserable face. *However, he recalled how Sun Lingwei had begged him pitifully for a peace knot when he went to Fu An Temple this morning. The Crown Prince had gotten into trouble and she was worried for her elder sister, the Crown Princess. He would regret it for life if he missed out on such a kind woman. His lifetime of happiness was*

definitely worth more than fifty taels.

“I will buy it! I will buy it! I will buy it!” Sheng Chujun took out a banknote.

Sheng Chuling laughed as he let go. “Stinky brat. When you successfully chased her, remember to give me a huge red packet!”
Success often depends on luck. This peace knot has turned into a family treasure.

Just a recap. Fu Shui (someone who looks like Chen Ji) handed Hong Yide over to Yan Zifang. It is strange since Yan Zifang doesn't even know Fu Shui. But Yan Zifang gladly accepted since he wants to screw over Lu Yunji for revenge. Meanwhile, Hong Yide wants to get revenge for his family, so he wants to kill the Emperor. But since he can't kill the Emperor, he tries to screw over the Crown Prince instead. Some of these characters have so much hatred that they would sacrifice themselves in order to get rid of the enemy.

We don't know who Fu Shui is (yet), and why he wants to harm the Crown Prince. He also looks like Chen Ji (the actor, in case you guys forgot). Dun dun dun...what do you think will happen now??

Court Lady

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The Grand Emperor was about to pass on. All the royal family members gathered by his bed to listen to his last words.

“Li Shimin.” The Grand Emperor called out his son’s full name. “I have been wondering whether karma really exists? If it does, I pray that it does not happen to your descendants.”

“Grand Emperor!” The Emperor also held a deep knot in his heart.

“Shut up! For many years, you have suppressed what I wanted to say. Now that I am about to die, you should at least let me finish what I want to say.” The Grand Emperor closed his eyes and he spat coldly. “You killed your brother, Crown Prince Li Jiancheng, at Xuanwu Gate and became the Emperor. This set the precedent of fratricide within the Li family. I will never forgive you for what you did and I am also afraid that this sad story will happen once again in our family.”

The Grand Emperor changed his tone and asked, “I conferred the title of Crown Prince to Jiancheng in the past but could not protect him. Let me ask you, you made Chengqian the Crown Prince, but can you protect him?”

The Emperor sighed, “Chengqian was bright and filial when he was young. But recently, he has disappointed me by what he has been doing.”

A flicker of light passed through the Grand Emperor's eyes and he questioned, "Is that his fault? Or is someone trying to harm him? How many Crown Princes in history were killed because of some malicious scheme? Back when you coveted the Crown Prince position and plotted against the Crown Prince, how many times were you able to escape uncaught?"

Upset, the Emperor said, "Imperial Father, I had no choice...." *If his brother did not want to kill him...*

"Enough. At this point, you don't have to defend yourself for your actions in the past. I just want you to ask yourself, how far were you willing to go for the position of the Emperor? How many evil things did you do to your siblings? Chengqian's enemies are the vicious traps set up for him. For the throne, people will go to extreme measures. If you do not protect Chengqian, he will become another Li Jiancheng."

The Emperor hesitated and muttered, "We are not sure how Hong Yide died and it involves Lu Yunji. If Chengqian..."

Grand Emperor snapped, "Hong Yide is a traitor, what worth is he? Lu Yunji is also a mere Duke, the Crown Prince is the root of the country!" He suddenly used the last of his strength to push himself up and grab his son's hand. With a stern face and cold eyes, he warned, "Remember! You must believe him and protect him for him to live. Once you suspect him, the people who want to take the throne from him will win and he will die! If I had been more firm, I would have used tougher measures to crack down on the enemies of the Crown Prince. Would he have died then? Would the Xuanwu Gate incident have happened?"

Growing weak, the Grand Emperor fell back down on his bed. He sighed, "Li Shimin, I will not forgive you. But since I am your father, I am not willing to see my descendants fight amongst themselves again. I do not want another Xuanwu Gate incident and another bloodbath amongst my kin. Do you understand?"

The Emperor nodded. "I understand. Chengqian is my Crown Prince, I will trust, protect him and ensure that his position will not waver."

The Crown Prince was safe! Empress Zhangsun heaved a soft sigh of relief. Fu Rou was right. Despite how much hatred the Grand Emperor had towards the Emperor and her, he would protect the Crown Prince.

Wearing a distraught expression, Grand Prince Liang rushed to the side of the bed and cried. "Imperial Father! Imperial Father! I have the pill that Fu Siyan got from Priest Sun. Everyone claims that he is the Pill God and his pills can treat any illness." The pill rolled out of the bottle. "Imperial Father, I will feed you the pill."

Grand Emperor shook his head and rejected him. "Foolish child. I am like an empty oil lamp and my time is approaching. No matter how good the pill is, it is useless."

"Imperial Father, please eat it. You will get better!" Grand Prince Liang forced a smile out through his tears. "Imperial Father, didn't you say that you want me to settle down? I am attracted to a lady who is from a prestigious background. She is very pretty and can also dance. I want to marry her."

Grand Emperor relaxed and smiled, "Good... good, then go for her and don't let this chance pass."

"Yes yes! I will do my best. If Imperial Father likes her, she can be my concubine. If Imperial Father wants to have a grandchild, I will quickly..."

Grand Emperor interrupted, "Empress, Grand Prince Liang has been spoiled by me. Can I trouble you to help him in the future?"

Empress Zhangsun respectfully agreed, "I will listen to Imperial Father's instructions."

The Grand Emperor sighed, "It has been so many years and I finally heard you call me Imperial Father. 'Grand Emperor' is such a loathsome title..." His hand dropped by his side lifelessly and his breathing stopped.

The Crown Prince rushed into Da An Palace with his grieving clothes. He stared blankly at the Grand Emperor's bed.

"Crown Prince, come and kneel beside me." The Emperor suddenly

instructed. The Crown Prince recovered from his shock and knelt down.

“Your Imperial Grandfather has left us.” The Emperor sounded choked. Looking at the Crown Prince’s sad expression, the Emperor said, “Before he left, I made a promise to him that I will trust and protect you. I will never let anyone harm you.”

The Crown Prince was shocked and he turned towards the Grand Emperor and bowed profusely. He had thought that the Grand Emperor harbored hatred towards him and never thought that the Grand Emperor would help him.

“Fang Xuanling, the culprit, Hong Yide, has committed suicide by poison. The Cangshan Mountain case is closed and no one else is allowed to speak of it again.” The Emperor gave his order.

Fang Xuanling asked, “Your Majesty, then what about Lu Yunji...”

“Hong Yide is vicious and he wanted to harm the Crown Prince. We cannot trust a single word of his. Since he wanted to harm the Crown Prince, he naturally wanted to take down Lu Yunji as well. Lu Yunji and his son are not guilty and can be freed.” *He was not going to pursue the matter. He could not afford to pursue it.*

“Instead, punish Yan Zifang by halving his salary for a year. Send someone from the Justice Office over and tell him to watch his words in the future. He needs to think before he speaks, how dare he talk nonsense in front of me?” *If someone was innocent, someone else had to be guilty.*

Fang Xuanling hesitated to speak. “Your Majesty, at Lizheng Palace, you ordered Yan Zifang to relay the words of Hong Yide. Yan Zifang had informed you that Hong Yide’s intentions could not be predicted and he could be instigating discord. You then ordered him to speak up without being afraid of being blamed.”

“What you said makes sense. Relay my orders, punish Yan Zifang by halving his salary for a year. Send someone from the Justice Office over to inform him.” The Emperor did not alter the punishment but changed the crime. “He was rude to me and did not have respect

when speaking at Lizheng Palace.”

The Emperor directed all his anger towards Yan Zifang.

The Lu family was having a feast to celebrate Lu Yunji and Lu Qi's release.

Lu Yunji could finally laugh. “I never imagined that I could leave prison twice unharmed. Hong Yide, you have finally died. A well-deserved death! A well-deserved death!”

“This time we really have to be thankful for the Crown Prince. The Emperor let the Crown Prince off and we were naturally freed too.” Lu Qi also sighed out in relief.

“No. We have to thank the Grand Emperor. His final words changed the Emperor's mind and the both of us were freed. Because the country is mourning, we cannot hold a banquet, hold performances or drink celebratory wine. We will drink tea instead to express our gratitude to the Grand Emperor.” Lu Yunji raised his cup.

Everyone raised their cups and drank. When Lu Qi placed his cup down, he turned to look at Fu Yin. Holding her hand, he asked, “Yin'er, why are you so pale? Are you not feeling well? I told you already that I am fine, what are you worried about?”

Fu Yin's expression turned red and she said, “I am fine. We are in front of Old Master and Young Lady.”

Fu Yin felt that she was going mad. *Because she had burned the letter, Lu Qi had not been prepared, so the father and son pair were imprisoned. However, when Lu Qi was in prison, she did not sleep well as she was constantly worried about him. Now, he was safe and fine, she felt guilty as she thought about her mother. Her heart was hot and cold and she could not feel at ease.*

Lu Qi laughed and released her hand.

Lu Yingying's cold glare swept past Fu Yin. She smiled towards her father and brother and said, “I knew that Father and Brother could

escape unharmed this time.”

“You are incredible.” Lu Qi turned into a good elder brother once again. He joked, “Are you Master Yuan? You can predict the future?”

“Yes I can predict the future.” Lu Yingying’s heart clenched with pain but she maintained her smile and added, “I also know that our family will have double the happiness soon.”

Lu Yunji was curious and he asked, “Oh? One of the happiness is our peaceful return home. What is the other one?”

Lu Yingying smiled meekly as she replied, “I am about to be married.”

Fu Yin was stunned and she suddenly recalled Lu Yingying going out often in the past few days. She had been trying to help her brother and father.

“Yingying...” Lu Qi knew that something was not right.

Lu Yingying cut him off and announced, “I have made a promise to Grand Prince Liang to marry him.”

Shocked, Lu Qi yelled, “What?”

Lu Yunji stared at his daughter for a second before he came to a realisation. “No wonder Grand Prince Liang had visited us in prison and even brought us things to eat.”

Lu Yingying shook her head and denied, “Father, you are mistaken...”

Lu Qi was blinded with anger as he raged, “What misunderstanding? It is clear what it is! I do not agree to this! Father, I will definitely not agree to Yingying marrying Grand Prince Liang! How is this a marriage? It is clearing a sacrifice!”

Lu Yingying remained calm. She knew clearly that everything had been settled. *At least, she was guilt free and she did not have any selfish thoughts of harming others.*

Aaiii. Yan Zifang couldn't get his revenge after all. Poor Yingying is sacrificing herself. What do you think is going to happen now?

Court Lady

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When the Emperor heard Lu Yunji and Lu Qi's request for an audience, he knew that they were here to reject the engagement. After all, Grand Prince Liang had a reputation of being a playboy.

As he expected, Lu Yunji immediately got to his knees. Instead of thanking the Emperor for releasing him from prison, he claimed that a misunderstanding had happened and his young daughter had personally made an engagement with Grand Prince Liang. However, she had not gone by the customs and respected traditions. She was not worthy to be Grand Prince Liang's wife.

Without wasting any breath, the Emperor asked, "Lu Yunji, do you not like Grand Prince Liang?"

Lu Yunji was shocked and he replied, "I do not dare to have that thought."

The Emperor scoffed, "Then go back and prepare. Once the period of mourning is over, have your daughter marry into Grand Prince Liang's residence."

As much as he did not like Grand Prince Liang, it was his personal reasons. If the Lu family disregarded Grand Prince Liang, they would be disrespecting the Imperial family.

Lu Qi boldly exclaimed, "Please forgive me for being so blunt but this

matter will not be appropriate!”

Afraid of Lu Qi's rashness, Lu Yunji stopped him and cried, “Your Majesty! I am old and useless already. Please allow me to return to my hometown to be farmers with my son and daughter.”

“You even suggest returning to your hometown.” The Emperor turned towards Lu Qi and asked, “Lu Qi, let me ask you, why did you say that the matter was not appropriate?”

With resolve, Lu Qi answered, “Grand Prince Liang may not be a good match for my sister. Grand Prince Liang is famous for being rough towards women. In Chang'an, everyone knows that Grand Prince Liang has beaten many women to death. I only have this one sister and I cannot bear to...”

Lu Yunji panicked and interrupted, “Shut up! Do you want to die?”

“As an older brother, even if I do not treasure my life, I cannot watch my sister give her life away to the devil!” Although he was normally on good terms with Grand Prince Liang, they were only using each other for their own benefits.

“You have spoken well. I will grant your request.” The Emperor called for men and ordered, “Drag Lu Qi out and cane him until he dies!”

Lu Yunji immediately begged, “Please have mercy, Your Majesty!”

However, the Emperor had the intention to kill and he wanted to use Lu Qi to tame Lu Yunji.

The sounds of the canes did not stop and Lu Yunji's heart beat furiously as he bowed towards the Emperor profusely. There was nothing else he could do.

After a while, the Emperor said, “I understand that you want to be a kind father and Lu Qi wants to be a good brother. Although both of you are very bold, you were not wrong. However, the Grand Emperor is also a good father and I also want to be a good brother. Is the Grand Emperor and I wrong in this sense?”

Lu Yunji remained on the floor and he stammered, “Your Majesty, I....”

“My father has recently passed away. When he was dying, Grand Prince Liang told him that he fell in love with a woman and will settle down. The Grand Emperor was ecstatic and he praised Grand Prince Liang twice. This was the Grand Emperor’s last wish and the last thing that I can do for him as his son.”

Lu Yunji gritted his teeth and pleaded, “I am willing to donate all my riches to the country and resign as a Duke. I beg you...”

“Lu Yunji, you have served me for many years. On account of that, I am giving you two choices. First, become Grand Prince Liang’s father-in-law happily. Second, disrespect me along with the entire Imperial family. All men of the Duke Chen Residence will be beheaded and the women sent to be prostitutes.”

Lu Yunji could see the resolve in the Emperor’s eyes and knew that no matter what he chose, his daughter would end up in the hands of Grand Prince Liang. It was only a matter of an official or unofficial route. He had no choice but to choose the proper route.

In the beginning, Lu Qi was still keeping track of how many beatings he had received but he lost count towards the end. Yet, he refused to cry out in pain. He would rather die than to allow his sister to be trampled on by Grand Prince Liang. His mother was dead and his father had to go out for battles frequently. His sister was incredibly valuable to him and he had watched her grow up.

All of a sudden, the official received an order and stopped the caning. Lu Qi struggled to open his eyes and he saw his father leave the Emperor’s hall slowly. He asked hopefully, “Father?”

Lu Yunji helped Lu Qi up and sighed, “Don’t talk about it, let’s go home.”

Lu Qi’s heart fell. *There was no more hope.*

The country’s mourning was supposed to last three years but since

the Emperor was sympathetic to his citizens, he changed it to a month. Hence, for the next thirty-six days, there could not be any festive drinking or marriages.

Lu Qi had still been hoping for a three year mourning period. Three years was long and with that time, and he might be able to think of a plan. Unfortunately, thirty-six days flew by very quickly.

Empress Zhangsun had managed to persuade Grand Prince Liang to marry Lu Yingying to be his main wife instead. Once the mourning period was over, the palace started to prepare for the joyous occasion of Grand Prince Liang's wedding. At this point, the arrow was already on the bow.

On this day, Lu Qi invited a person from the Precious Jem Shop to prepare wedding jewelry for Lu Yingying. The boss of the shop dug through his collection of jewelry and introduced each piece in detail.

However, sadness filled Fu Yin's heart and she turned around to wipe her tears silently. Lu Qi demanded the best jewelry for his sister but the more he did that, the more Fu Yin felt bad for Lu Yingying. Despite how unruly Lu Yunji and Lu Qi were typically, they were incredibly loving and protective of Lu Yingying. They could only try their best to give her the best wedding dowry to make up to her. Fu Yin looked at their actions and thought of her own family. If this were the case for her, her own family would do their utmost best as well.

"Yin'er, help me bring these to Yingying..." Lu Qi turned around and realized that Fu Yin was crying. He consoled, "This matter is already set and there is no use pondering over it. Stop crying. Even if you cry, don't let Yingying see you."

Fu Yin nodded, took the tray that was filled with jewelry and walked into Lu Yingying's room. Without sparing a glance at the tray of jewelry, Lu Yingying instructed, "Let my brother make the decisions."

Fu Yin was about to turn and leave but she suddenly turned back and hesitated to speak. "Did you... did Grand Prince Liang start liking you because you helped me the other day?"

“Yes.” Lu Yingying immediately answered. Fu Yin muttered, “You should not have...”

Lu Yingying coldly glared at her and snapped, “Yes, I should not have saved you. You murdered my cousin. It was your retribution to have bumped into Grand Prince Liang. However, I had to save you or I would not be better off than you in hell. I will not be celebrating your death because I will continue to live. Do you understand? I will not have to agonize over the fact that I caused my mother’s death, depriving my brother of his mother’s love and my father of his wife’s love. I learned that I should resolve things once they happen. Since it is over, that’s it and it will not harm anyone else. Therefore, if the situation happened again, I would have still saved you. Despite how much I hate you, I will not let my brother be sad.”

Fu Yin was stunned for a moment before she slowly made her way out of the room.

With Grand Prince Liang’s marriage approaching, the Crown Prince and his wife paid him a visit.

Grand Prince Liang immediately drank three cups of wine in a row as he laughed, “Crown Prince, please accept my apologies. If I had not been a big mouth that day and told you what Hong Yide said at the Justice Office, you would not have met Hong Yide and saw him commit suicide. It was my fault that I caused you to be imprisoned. Imperial Father even scolded me severely and called me dumb. I am very sorry.”

The Crown Prince replied, “It is not your fault. Hong Yide’s scheme was too malicious.” Furthermore, his Imperial Grandfather’s last words helped him and he was now more open to be on good terms with Grand Prince Liang.

Sun Lingshu also added, “Grand Prince Liang, the matter is over. Please do not put it on your heart. The Crown Prince is lucky and fortunate, and he was also able to discern his enemies and allies through this event.”

"That is right. We all learn with experience and we can grow from these lessons. Life is deep and mysterious. As the Crown Prince, any slight mistake may result in a detrimental state for you. Only those who are lonely and share adversity can rely on each other."

The Crown Prince raised his cup and smiled warmly at Sun Lingshu.

"You two are acting so sweet in front of me, are you ignoring me?" Grand Prince Liang laughed.

"Aren't you about to marry a wife? Lu Yingying is spectacularly beautiful and has outstanding features. Everyone will be jealous of you in the future."

Sun Lingshu also added, "She is a beauty indeed. The Crown Prince only met her a few times but he has not been able to forget her and has been continuously praising her."

The Crown Prince's expression stayed the same. "What do you mean I have not been able to forget her? You're the only one I have in my heart right now. There is no one else I have eyes for."

Sun Lingshu's heart raced and she blushed.

Grand Prince Liang burst out with laughter. "Look at this, look at this. You are flirting with each other with every few sentences. You are disregarding me, the guest. Ever since the Crown Prince was released from prison, he has been treating the Crown Princess with utmost care and love."

The Crown Prince smiled, "A relationship that went through hardship is valuable. Once you are married to the right woman, you will realise that you can both spur each other forward and improve together as a couple."

"Thank you for your advice." Grand Prince Liang cupped his hands together. "I have another meeting and have to go first. You two can continue your date together."

After Grand Prince Liang left, Sun Lingshu laughed, "Grand Prince Liang really does not have a care in the world. He left after a few words and did not even finish his food."

The Crown Prince replied, "His personality is like that. Since he was spoilt by the Grand Emperor, he is immature. However, if you want to have fun with him, he can give you the time of your life."

"Really? Then I will have to persuade you to visit him more often."

"Zhan Xuanzhi wants me to cut my relationship off with Grand Prince Liang but you want me to spend more time with him? Bad company will influence each other. Is that appropriate?"

"I do not care about anything else. As long as Your Highness is happy, I will also be happy." After such a long period of receiving the cold shoulder from the Crown Prince, Sun Lingshu now realized that she had to follow his will to gain his heart.

"You are the best to me."

As she expected, the Crown Prince was in a good mood.

Court Lady

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Zhang He and Yan Zifang were against each other now.

Nothing big happened. Zhang He ate a lamb leg in the West City and did not pay for it. The shopkeeper as well as other onlookers refused to let him go and naturally, they got into a fight. Zhang He has experienced many such cases. Moreover, his subordinates were all skilled in martial arts and the citizens usually could not stand more than a few kicks and punches from them. Unexpectedly, the onlookers this time were quite skilled as well. They also formed the majority, and in the end, his men were the ones that were beaten up.

At this moment, Yan Zifang arrived with his men.

Zhang He's face was swollen from getting beaten up. Yet, not only did Yan Zifang not punish the onlookers, he even listened to them explain their nonsense. All because of the unpaid lamb leg, Yan Zifang actually captured Zhang He.

Zhang He knew that he and Yan Zifang did not get along and did not bother arguing with him. He instructed his subordinates to inform his father as well as Consort Du He, who he had been planning to meet, that he would not be able to make it. As long as those two stepped out to help him, Yan Zifang would not be able to do anything.

As Yan Zifang saw Zhang He's subordinates leave to deliver messages, he did not stop them. He brought Zhang He to the West City's

government office.

What Zhang He did not know was that Yan Zifang had already taken note of how Zhang He bullied and took advantage of people in the city. Those exceptionally skilled onlookers were all people that he had planted to wait around the lamb shop for several days. They had been waiting for Zhang He.

Meanwhile, as Du He received news that Zhang He had been captured by Yan Zifang, he was loyal and intended to rescue Zhang He. However, Princess Xincheng saw him and asked him where he was going.

Du He laughed, "I am going out to meet a friend."

"What great things can you be up to with your useless friends?" Princess Xincheng inserted a jewel hairpin into her hair. "Consort, is this nice?"

Du He flattered her. "Beautiful! Princess, you are as beautiful as a goddess. You look pretty no matter what you wear!"

He walked around the screen to Princess Xincheng. However, he saw two other people in the room. One of them was Lian Yan'er. The other was a lady that he did not recognise. She had the aura of a tiger and looked courageous.

After Lian Yan'er decided to join the General Zhenhai Residence, she taught Ma Hainiu the three golden rules for chasing men. The third rule was to be independent and strive for self-improvement. Ma Hainiu had spent her life as a pirate. Other than her strength, she had numerous jewels obtained from ships over the years. Not only her, her brother, Haicao, as well as her other brothers in General Zhenhai's residence had an endless collection of them.

Lian Yan'er was smart and thought that this was a good business idea. She collaborated with Ma Hainiu to open a beauty shop. They specialised in selling unique and special jewellery. Along with Lian Yan'er's makeup skills, which she had perfected over the years, and Consort Han's help in promotion, they quickly became famous in Chang'an. Even Princess Xincheng was their frequent customer.

“Princess, they are...” However, Du He felt uncomfortable seeing Lian Yan’er.

“You are always running about yet you don’t know about the beauty shop that opened in Chang’an? Even Prince Han often visits them to buy jewellery for Consort Han. These two ladies are the owners of Belle Shop.”

Du He thought about how he wanted to avoid Lian Yan’er, as well as Zhang He, who was waiting to be rescued. “Princess, I...I am meeting someone...”

“Are you that busy? You are always going out.” Princess Xincheng was unhappy. “I still want you to help me stick on a flora inlay.”

Ma Hainiu and Lian Yan’er exchanged glances. Lian Yan’er stepped forward and lightly pasted the flora inlay on Princess Xincheng’s cheek.

Princess Xincheng was dubious. “Isn’t the flora inlay supposed to be stuck on the forehead? Why did you stick it on my cheek? Won’t I get laughed at?”

Ma Hainiu said, “Princess, please rest assured. Since ancient times, there have been people who stick flora inlays on their faces. During the Three Kingdoms Period, Crown Prince Zhou drank and was dancing under the moonlight. He accidentally hit his favourite concubine’s face. Several red dots appeared on her face. Crown Prince Zhou actually thought that Lady Deng looked even more beautiful this way. Very soon, the people from the palace as well as the commoners started to use rouge to dot their cheeks. Emperor Jianwen of Liang also had a poem. Shallow dimples formed by red, also refers to this.”

Princess Xincheng laughed, “We are not done and I am already happy. The lady owners of Belle Shop are really talented.”

Ma Hainiu was proud. She finally managed to use the things that she had learnt at Consort Han’s place.

Seeing how Du He was about to sneak away, she said loudly.

“Speaking of pasting flora inlays, if Yan’er says she is second place, no one will dare to claim first place. In order to learn this skill, she had spent many years in Swallow House.”

“Swallow House?” Princess Xincheng was aware. “Isn’t that a famous brothel in Chang’an?”

Du He turned and came back. He could not leave. He could not let Lian Yan’er give him away. In Princess Xincheng’s eyes, although he was not dashing handsome, he was at least loyal to her. If she knows that he frequents brothels, she may even bring it up to the Emperor.

Lian Yan’er glanced at Du He and smiled. “In order to seduce men, the courtesans at brothels need to make themselves beautiful and alluring. If one wants to learn how to beautify oneself, Swallow House would be the best place to go.”

Princess Xincheng did not know that Lian Yan’er was once the head courtesan at Swallow House. “So that is where you learn how to put on makeup.”

“Not only did I learn how to put on makeup, I also experienced the various ugly sides of men.” Lian Yan’er’s gaze hardened and Du He became frightened. “At home, they are like great husbands. However, when they get to Swallow House, they become the most despicable pervert on earth. There was even one that brought out his wife’s belt. When he was indulging himself, he placed it on the girls at the brothel and treated it like a game.”

Princess Xincheng was startled. “There are such disgusting men on earth?”

“His poor wife is completely oblivious and still thinks that she has a great husband. In actuality, his wife’s belt is still with the brothel girl.”

Du He coughed dryly. Ma Hainiu grinned. “I heard that when men go out to drink, they always like to entertain themselves at brothels. Consort, are you meeting your friend to go to Swallow House?”

Princess Xincheng frowned. "He wouldn't dare."

Du He stammered, "I wouldn't dare...def...definitely wouldn't dare."

"Your Highness, I am done sticking." Lian Yan'er took a step back.

Ma Hainiu seamlessly took over. "Your Highness, this flora inlay looks best under the sun. Let me help you out."

Only Du He and Lian Yan'er were left in the hall.

Du He looked outside and saw the Princess looking into a copper mirror, admiring her own reflection. He turned back and glared at Lian Yan'er. "You better burn the belt immediately. In the future, you are not allowed to come here anymore. Do you understand?"

"Consort, why would you think I would listen to you?" Lian Yan'er suddenly raised her voice. "Your Highness."

Du He was frightened. "You..."

Princess Xincheng looked back. "Yes?"

Du He lowered his voice. "Okay, okay, what do you want?"

Lian Yan'er smiled and looked at Princess Xincheng. "I specially chose an emerald flora inlay to match with this kingfisher hairpin. Your Highness, do you like it?"

Princess Xincheng turned from side to side and twirled around. She was extremely pleased. Lian Yan'er smiled at Du He. "This is the right attitude."

Ma Hainiu saw this from outside and the corners of her mouth turned up. Everything was going according to her leader's plan.

In case you guys forgot, these two "He" guys bullied Lian Yan'er before (remember the chapter where Ma Haihu tried to save Lian Yan'er and then both him and Yan Zifang got beat up?) It's the chapter where I was complaining about their names being so similar

(the Hehehe one LOLOLOL). Yu He, the eunuch serving Concubine Yan, was the one that saved them that time.

Yan Zifang wants his revenge...

Court Lady

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When Du He reached West City's government office, Zhang He was about to get canned.

Zhang He immediately shouted as he saw Du He. "Consort! Save me! Yan Zifang is an evil bastard. He wants to torture me! Consort, you are here in time! Hurry and lock this bastard up in the Justice Office!"

Ma Haihu snorted, "What a tone. Does your family own the Justice Office?"

Du He replied, "That's right. Do you own the Justice Office?"

Zhang He was confused. He was certain that Du He would help him.

"Zhang He, you bully kind people and have done numerous bad things. I have already disliked you." The only thing on Du He's mind was the fact that Lian Yan'er had Princess Xincheng's belt with her.

Zhang He's mouth gaped open. "Consort, have you lost your mind?"

Du He's eyes jutted out. "Wow! Now you are insulting me? Do you know what kind of punishment befalls those who insult relatives of the Imperial Family?"

Yan Zifang shouted, "Zhang He, there is clear evidence. Are you

going to plead guilty?”

Zhang He realised. “So you all are together! Du He, you are amazing! Don’t forget that I know all the bad things that you have done better than anyone else. When I tell Princess Xincheng...”

Yan Zifang did not wait for Zhang He to finish shouting as he ordered the canning to start. Zhang He could not stand it and after a few hits, he shouted. “Stop hitting me! I plead guilty! I plead guilty!”

“I thought you would hold out. You barely got canned.” Yan Zifang gestured to Ma Haihu. “Get Zhang He’s fingerprint.”

After Zhang He signed, he glared at Ma Haihu who took the paper. Then, Zhang He glared furiously at Yan Zifang. “You better not be too arrogant. When my father comes...”

“Who ate leopard’s guts and dares to touch my son?” Zhang He’s father arrived murderously.

Zhang He was about to cry. “Father, you are finally here! Father, save me!”

Zhang Li did not come alone. He had arrived with Xu Liangping and the city guards. As he saw how pathetically his son was sprawled on the floor, he was furious.

“Come...come guards...” Zhang Li seemed to slur as his face was red. It seemed like he was high from drinking. “Get them...the one with the surname Yan and the group that beat up my son. Tie them all up!”

Yan Zifang was unafraid. “Official Zhang, we are all ministers with respective positions and responsibilities. I am in charge of the order in West City. Your son has committed a crime and was caught by me. It is only natural. You reek of alcohol and barge in with a group of people. What are you trying to do?”

Zhang Li pointed at Yan Zifang. “Who are you to talk! You are just a pirate. How dare you touch my Zhang family? I will show you. You are hardly worth anything in West City!”

Xu Liangping was put in a position. "Official Zhang. If this matter were to blow up, I am afraid..."

"What are you afraid of?" As soon as Zhang Li spoke, he pushed Xu Liangping back. "Bring him down from up there and beat him up! If heaven falls, I will hold it!"

The city guards dashed towards the West City bailiffs. Unexpectedly, Haicao and the rest of the group had been waiting as they flooded out from the back of the court and surrounded Zhang Li. Wearing an Imperial Censor's robe, Huai Donghai, walked out as well.

Yan Zifang had become smarter. If he wanted to capture Zhang He and Zhang Li, he needed someone to control the public.

Zhang Li could not see clearly and shouted, "Let me go! Bunch of bastards. How dare you treat me like this! Just wait and see! I will kill all of you!"

Huai Donghai shook his head. "Ridiculous. Throw a bucket of cold water on him to sober him up."

Haicao splashed a bucket of cold water over Zhang Li's head. Zhang Li's entire body trembled and clearly saw who was in front of him. "Imperial Censor...Huai...Official Huai?" Why are you here?" His articulation was much clearer.

"General Yan said that there will be a good show here today and invited me to watch. Official Zhang, you really opened my eyes today." Huai Donghai's expression was serious.

"Official Huai, Official Huai, this is a conspiracy." Zhang Li reacted quickly as he felt as though he had been set up. "I...I was slightly drunk..."

"You are an official who should be handling official duties now. However, you drank until you were drunk. This is your first crime. Moreover, you brought people to barge into..." Huai Donghai suddenly caught sight of Zhang Li's collar. "What are you wearing inside? Men? Take off his official robe."

Ma Haihu yanked it open. Zhang Li was wearing a purple robe

inside.

Huai Donghai was stunned. “Zhang Li, the Emperor, had long ago declared rules with regard to uniform. Only officials above the third rank can wear purple. You are not of the third rank but you are wearing a purple robe. Are you disregarding the Emperor’s edict?”

Zhang Li quickly begged for mercy. “This...this is for luck...Official Huai, please let me go...”

“I think you are really confused. I am an Imperial Censor and am in-charge of ensuring that officials fulfil their duties and remain lawful. How can I help someone like you cover up? I am going back now to write a report to impeach you!” Huai Donghai turned to leave. He happened to see Du He. He praised Du He amiably. “I heard that Consort He was once good friends with Zhang He. I thought that you came today to speak up for Zhang He. I was worried for you. I never expected you to be upright and plainly speak against unlawful acts. You are righteous.”

Du He’s palms were sweating. “Official Huai is too generous with your praise. I am merely doing what I should do.”

Huai Donghai approved of what he said and finally left.

Yan Zifang ordered people to lock Zhang Li and his son up. A cold look could be seen in his eyes. Zhang Li would never have expected that the purple robe was set up by Yan Zifang. Yan Zifang had requested for Attendant Yu He’s help to tell Zhang Li, when he was drinking, that the secret to getting a promotion is to wear a purple robe underneath. He then drugged Zhang Li’s drink with a secret medicine from Persia, causing Zhang Li to behave so foolishly.

“Consort, this is a rare chance. Would you like to have a chat with me?”

Yan Zifang was starting to understand the game of politics. As he saw Du He hesitate before nodding, he understood something else.
Disreputable friends were also a necessity for office.

Fu Rou had been summoned by Prince Zhou to Lingxiao Palace. After having lived in the palace for a while, her temper had simmered by a lot. In the past, when Prince Zhou asked her to go for no reason, she would be fuming internally when she got to Lingxiao Palace. Now, she was emotionless.

From afar, she saw Prince Zhou sitting across a confucius-style elder. Slamming their palms on the table and using chopsticks to hit bowls, they were singing together. It was rare that she saw this happy side of Prince Zhou. She could guess who this elder was.

She walked into the palace and presented the tray to Prince Zhou. “I have made the clothes according to Your Highness’ instructions.”

Prince Zhou ordered someone to take the tray from her and proceeded to introduce her to the elder. “Tutor, this is Fu Siyan. She was originally a palace lady from the Seamstress Department. If sewing were like a martial art, she would be the top expert.”

The elder looked at the embroidery on the clothes before looking up at Fu Rou and smiling. “I can see that your embroidery is unique.”

Fu Rou was humble. “I do not dare to accept the high praise. If there are no other instructions, I will take my leave.”

However, Prince Zhou said, “Fu Siyan, let me introduce you. This is Tutor Qian, Qian Wenjing. He is the one that I often talk about.” He wanted to share his joy with her.

Qian Wenjing recalled that when they were singing poems, Prince Zhou had chosen the song < Southern Zhou. Hanguang >. *He clearly had someone he liked but could not get. When Fu Siyan appeared, he suddenly became eager. There was no doubt that he liked this lady.*

Fu Rou bowed politely. “Tutor Qian.”

“Today, I reunited with Tutor and I am extremely happy. You should stay for a drink.”

Fu Rou hesitated. “This...is not proper etiquette.”

“Tutor is my teacher and I am considered to be half your teacher.

Therefore, Tutor is like your teacher's teacher. It is reasonable for you to pay your respects to and drink a few cups of wine with Tutor." Prince Zhou was extremely skilled at talking.

Fu Rou truly enjoyed learning and held scholars with extremely high regard. She felt like this was a rare chance and did not reject him any further.

Qian Wenjing felt like this lady knew how to push and pull appropriately. She was accomplished. No wonder she could make the arrogant Prince Zhou fall for her. Qian Wenjing wanted to help Prince Zhou create opportunities and invited Fu Rou to have a seat.

Prince Zhou suddenly said, "It has been long since I have asked Tutor to teach. There is a saying that I do not understand. The nobleman worries that after his death, his name will no longer be praised."

Qian Wenjing did not understand where this was coming from and thought that Prince Zhou was inflexible. "Fu Siyan is here with us. Let's not talk about principles. She might think it is uninteresting."

Fu Rou was sitting upright. "It is a rare opportunity to hear Tutor teach. I would like to learn."

Qian Wenjing's impression of Fu Rou got even better. "This saying comes from The Analects of Confucius. What the nobleman is most worried about is that no one will write and praise him anymore. But if you think that Confucius wants fame, that is the wrong mindset. Qu Yuan once said as age slowly descends, the only fear is not having established oneself. Qu Yuan was worried that his talents and what he learned would go to waste. Establishing oneself is only superficial, what he really means is to repay the country and do things. To serve the country and the citizens and leave his name behind. Because his name would signal the contribution that he has made through his life. Only when caring about one's name, would one be cautious and conscientious, not daring to make any mistake."

"Tutor, have you ever considered that some people may not care about becoming famous? Life is short. Happiness is the most important. If they could pull themselves out of society and be with their loved ones. It can also be a happy life."

Prince Zhou had a different opinion. Fu Rou could hear the implied meaning behind Prince Zhou's tone and knew that he was referring to her and Sheng Chumu.

Would you choose to serve the country and its citizens? Or would you rather pull yourself out of society to be with your loved ones?

Court Lady

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Qian Wenjing's voice fluttered slightly. "Life belongs to heaven and earth, so there is a responsibility to repay. A country supports a man and he should repay his country. Huo Qubing said that the Huns have yet to be exterminated, how can he consider home. Could he be a fool and not know how to find a beautiful lady and spend the rest of his life lovingly with her? Taking a woman and going into seclusion is just escaping. It is a person's selfish motives and not worth mentioning. In the beginnings of the six kingdoms, there were righteous laws and talented people were abundant. In the end, they fell to the Qin Dynasty. Reason? Because there were too many people escaping the chaos of the world. All they wanted was to spend their days freely. What a joke. If the country is in trouble, how can they be safe? If one is ambitious, they should remain ambitious. Whenever the country needs help, they should be ready to help. That is the only way for their births to not be in vain."

Fu Rou felt uneasy. She returned to the palace because she had no choice. It was for her elder sister and she had to expose her identity. Before that, she had already accepted Chumu's way of thinking to find a nice place to spend their days. Now that she is back in the palace, she could only console herself. However, she still held selfish wants. When the Emperor said that he was willing to fulfil one of Chumu's wishes, she was hoping that he would choose to take her away. Hence, Qian Wenjing's words made her guilty.

“Fu Siyan, please do not take offense. Now that Great Tang is flourishing, I have come across many young people who act without thinking. They always act in a moment of excitement.” Qian Wenjing could see that Fu Rou’s expression had changed.

“No, I will take Tutor’s words as an awakening. I haven’t read much but like to hear stories. I always felt that small stories can bring about great logic. From what you just said, I understand that morality depends on one’s heart. However, if you would forgive me, I would like to ask a question. If everyone has a duty to the country, what about women?”

Qian Wenjing smiled slightly. “Fu Siyan, have you read < <Zaichi> > from the Book of Songs?”

Fu Rou recited, “Women are benevolent but they also have their own conduct.”

Qian Wenjing nodded. “Women’s thoughts are gentler and they tend to be concerned. But women also have their own thoughts and conduct. This poem was written by Lady Mu. She was the daughter of Wei Hou and married into the Xu Kingdom. When she found out that Wei Kingdom had been invaded, she made the journey overnight to rush back to Wei Kingdom. However, her husband stopped her halfway through her journey. In her despair, she wrote < <Zaichi> >. This is her love and duty for her country.”

Fu Rou got up and bowed. She spoke politely. “Thank you Tutor for your teachings. I have been enlightened.”

“Fu Siyan, you don’t have to be so polite. I have seen a lot but seldom encounter such a clear-minded lady as yourself. As long as you have the desire to, you will achieve great things. Soon, I will have to return to Prince Zhao. Since you like reading, His Highness is also someone who likes to read a lot. Please accompany him occasionally so His Highness will not be idle.” Qian Wenjing looked at Prince Zhou as he said this.

Prince Zhou knew that his teacher had seen through his intentions and a slight astonishment crossed his face. He then said seriously. “Tutor, you came back at the right time. I was about to ask Imperial

Father to transfer you back to my side.”

“Well, although it is good, we cannot surmise His Majesty’s intentions. There is no need to force it. Now that you are accomplished in your studies, I can be rest assured. Prince Zhao, on the other hand--” Qian Wenjing sighed. “He is stubborn. Just his excessive love to hunt already makes it difficult for me. Thankfully he is still young and there is time to change.”

“Prince Zhao is arrogant. Tutor will have to suffer. It will be better to stay by my side.” Prince Zhou had already made up his mind. He was going to get his Imperial Father’s approval. “Oh right, I also prepared a set of good quality writing materials for you. I will go and get it.”

Prince Zhou went into the palace room to get the items. Fu Rou poured tea for Qian Wenjing.

Qian Wenjing took a sip of tea. “His Highness is a keen and earnest learner. He is outstanding amongst the princes. It is because of this...” His voice suddenly paused as if he was deliberating if he should say it. In the end, he said it. “His Majesty pays a lot of attention to him. It is to the point that there are a lot of restrictions on what he wants. He has many unfulfilled wishes and is only left with loneliness.”

“I know.” In front of someone she respected, she was honest.

“After I leave, I hope that you would help me to ease His Highness’ anxiety. He should be happy, the world is broad and he should not be overly concerned.”

Fu Rou froze. It seemed like Qian Wenjing could guess the result of Prince Zhou’s request.

Alas, when Prince Zhou mentioned the transfer the following morning, the Crown Prince immediately objected. His reason was dignified as he felt that Prince Zhao is the one that needs a teacher like Qian Wenjing more. The Emperor decided to leave Qian Wenjing with Prince Zhao.

When Fu Rou heard this news, she rushed to Lingxiao Palace to bid

farewell to Qian Wenjing along with Prince Zhou. Although they only spoke once, she highly respected this teacher, who had unusually good insights.

After Qian Wenjing left, Prince Zhou's forced smile disappeared and sat in his palace in desolation.

"Your Highness, do not be sad. As Tutor Qian said, you should be happy and look broadly at the world. Don't worry too much. Moreover, I believe that your fate with Tutor Qian has not ended. There is still a long road that you both can walk together." Fu Rou could not turn and leave immediately.

"So Tutor knew that Imperial Father would not give me permission." Prince Zhou laughed bitterly, "When Imperial Father said that he owed me, it was rare that I asked him to give you to me. He promised me but did not do it. What more Tutor Qian, who could help me with my troubles. I would rather Imperial Father ignore and not say that he cares about me, as now I have become a thorn in the Crown Prince's eyes. Maybe that way, I can have some things that belong to me. Look at me. In such a big palace filled with jewels, there are so many people around but I have absolutely nothing."

Fu Rou's heart ached. If Prince Zhou did not like her, perhaps she could become his good friend. But now, she could only maintain her distance and speak comforting words. She did not dare to step any closer.

"But seeing you now, I feel slightly comforted." Prince Zhou took a deep breath as happiness filled the corners of his eyes.

"Why?" Fu Rou lowered her head and looked at herself. *Why is he looking at her like that?*

"You are alone and I am alone. We both have someone in our hearts but cannot get them. We are both people that have been left alone."

Fu Rou huffed, "Your Highness is right. However, I am different from you in that I believe in Sheng Chumu. His feelings towards me will not change." She turned and walked out of his palace. As she walked, she recited to herself, "We know each other and our lives together

will not end here. Even if mountains have no corners, the river is exhausted, thunder rumbles, snow falls in summer...”

Prince Zhou looked at her disappearing figure and his expression turned sorrowful once again. “...Or heaven and earth joins, how can I cut away from my love? Fu Rou, you are really so cruel. You are not leaving me any hope.”

Oh Prince Zhou. *Look at me. In such a big palace filled with jewels, there are so many people around but I have absolutely nothing.*

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The entire Chang'an was celebrating Grand Prince Liang's marriage. The Lu Residence was decorated magnificently. A sea of celebratory red and lights greeted one's eyes.

Lu Yingying sat alone in her chamber. She looked gorgeous in her wedding dress. However, her expression was cold and her eyes were like a secluded pond. It was as if she could not hear the noise from outside. She looked at the sky through the small cracks in her window.

The sky was clear and blue. She had wished for torrential rains, hoping that she could postpone her marriage slightly. She had thought that she could face it. Only on the day of her marriage, did she know how scared she was.

Her father told her to try to follow whatever Grand Prince Liang wanted and not mind Grand Prince Liang's absurd life. Her marriage was bestowed by the Emperor and she just needed to give birth to a son and her position would be secured. Even if she loses his adoration, her position as consort would not shake. Her brother did not tell her to be a good consort to Grand Prince Liang. He merely prepared the best dowry and wedding dress for her. All brides would be jealous of her. She knew that what they wanted was to give her the best appearance so that Grand Prince Liang would not look down on their Lu family or her.

She did not care about being married to Grand Prince Liang on paper. But she knew that this mindset of hers was too gullible. Tonight, she was going to be married to Grand Prince Liang. She has already decided to marry him but when she thought about him touching her, she trembled in fear. She could not stand the thought of being touched by anyone other than Yan Zifang.

Yan Zifang! He was ingrained in her mind and heart, making her miss him, feel hurt, hatred and sympathy. Yet she could not give up her love for him. Every moment was torturing her.

Today, as she was about to marry another man, she felt a sense of betrayal. A betrayal caused by her own self!

The door made a sound. Lu Yingying turned to look. It was Fu Yin.

“What are you doing here?” She shifted her attention. “I have nothing to say to you.”

“I just wanted to tell you that even if you live together everyday with the one you love, your heart may still ache with pain that makes you feel like death. I am not as relaxed or happy as you think I am.” Fu Yin was also suffering.

Lu Yingying only felt like laughing. “Will knowing that you are not happy make me happy? Actually, I wish that you could be happy.”

Two ladies were suffering at the same time. They did not know the cause of each other's pain but they were both kind.

Lu Yingying got up and headed towards the door. “Although I don't like you, I would rather not have anyone else be as unlucky as me. Therefore, Fu Yin, you have to be happy with my elder brother.”

Lu Yingying walked towards the door. She left her room, her family home and stepped onto the carriage. There was no turning back. All of a sudden, her gut feeling told her to lift the beaded curtains by the carriage window.

Yan Zifang stood amongst the crowd, staring at her with an expressionless face.

Lu Yingying's heart sped up involuntarily. However, it slowed under his cold gaze. She released her hand and the curtain beads knocked against each other. Her heart slowly settled. *She was foolish. How could she have thought that he was here to stop her from getting married? Most likely, he was worried that she would not marry Grand Prince Liang and continue bothering him!*

Lu Yingying took a deep breath as she turned her gaze to look at the hazy entrance of her residence. It was time for her to leave all her feelings behind. Since she could not hide from it, she could only start again from Grand Prince Liang's residence. Whether she was lucky or not, she would bravely face and undertake the responsibility.

Yellow sand and brown earth. A huge river split two different worlds. A horse galloped calmly along a tall slope beside the river. Both the rider and the horse were adorned with metal gear. Wind blew over the person's scars, getting a feel of the high-spirit of the rider.

Behind the rider, farms stretch over a large area as a village lay in the horizon. Smoke vapor filled the air and blood stained the ground. A battle had clearly just taken place. However, the faces of the cotton-clad farmers were one of happiness.

It was a victory for justice. The village had suffered from numerous raids from horse-bandits and were at their wits end when they met Sheng Chumu.

After Sheng Chumu arrived at the borders, he volunteered to guard the most difficult outpost. He requested that there must be a battle. From Tongtian Pass, Pingtu Valley, Shuiwu Slope, Jiusha Town and Xisha Mountain, he cleared the entire way. They thought that someone known to be the number one hedonist in the past would only flourish with words. They never expected to have a killing god. Sheng Chumu cleaned up the entire stretch such that it was even more peaceful than Chang'an.

He was at the last stop -- Dongzheng Pass. After going through his "relentless" pursuit, today was finally the last day. They were going to clean up everything perfectly and not leave a single horse bandit

behind.

Sheng Chumu looked at the river rushing by, a saying rose in his heart -- *Vast and hazy reeds, white dew appears as frost. That person is somewhere across the water. He had already escaped to such a far away land and was constantly fighting battles day and night. He made himself so busy that he did not even have time to sleep. But why does the image of Fu Rou keep on appearing in his mind? Must he crack his skull open with a rock before he could stop thinking about her?*

"General, we have caught a deserter." A soldier ran forward and handed an identification tag to him. "His name is Ye Qiulang."

Just in time. Now there was something to distract him. In the end, when he reached the village house, they not only caught Ye Qiulang, but his lover, Yan'er, as well.

"You became a deserter for a woman?" When Sheng Chumu said this, he found it awkward.

Ye Qiulang did not pay attention. "I grew up with Yan'er but the court sent me for military service. When I thought of becoming a soldier, I would have to fight. When I fight, the chances of dying is high. When I left, I told her not to wait for me and to find a nice man to marry. Our hometown is so far from the borders. She is a weak lady and I never thought that she would come all the way here."

Yan'er cried, "This is not his fault. I am the one who asked him to leave with me."

Ye Qiulang argued, "No, I was the one that made the decision. I will take responsibility for my actions."

"Bastard!" Sheng Chumu suddenly became furious. "Drag Ye Qiulang out and cane him 100 times!" This couple stung his eyes. *Weren't they like him and Fu Rou in the past? Not caring about anything and willing to go far away for love.*

Yan'er jumped up and protected Ye Qiulang, preventing the soldiers from dragging him away. "I did not come all the way to the borders from my hometown just to see him get beaten to death. Without you,

I will not go anywhere!” She turned back sharply, her gaze filled with sorrow. “General, why are you so cruel? Don’t you have someone you like as well? Don’t you wish to spend the rest of your life with her?”

Sheng Chumu suppressed the feelings that were threatening to erupt in him and replied coldly, “I can’t answer your question. But there is someone that can answer it.”

He took big steps out of the house and asked the soldiers to push Ye Qiulang and Yan’er out. He pointed in the distance at a woman and a child who had just been murdered. “Every man has to support and protect his country and home. If everyone were selfish like you, forgetting their duties and only thinking of deserting to spend the rest of their days peacefully, what would happen to this village? What would happen to Great Tang? Tell me. Are you all in the wrong?” What Fu Rou said in the past wasn’t wrong. Seeing it from another point of view, he finally understood how selfish he had been!

Ye Qiulang knelt down in guilt. “I am in the wrong. I am willing to accept the punishment.”

Yan’er did not look good either. “General, I am willing to take half of the 100 hits.”

Ye Qiulang became anxious. “General, do not listen to her. This had nothing to do with her.”

Sheng Chumu’s expression did not change. “Cane Ye Qiulang 100 times.”

Ye Qiulang breathed a sigh of relief. He walked to the side and lay down.

After a solid 100 hits, Ye Qiulang did not move. Tears were streaming down Yan’er’s face. Sheng Chumu’s fists were clenched. *The greatest taboo in the military was desertion. It affected the troop and as the leader he could not ignore military rules for his own selfish reasons, even if he was once as foolish as Ye Qiulang.*

The soldiers came to report that they were done with the punishment.

Sheng Chumu asked. "How is he? Is he still alive?" *He could only wish that the heavens would help Ye Qiulang.*

"He is still alive but he has lost consciousness."

The soldiers' reply allowed Sheng Chumu to breathe a sigh of relief. He seemed to recall something as he turned to Yan'er. "I have punished Ye Qiulang but I have not punished you. We are lacking a person to clean and do miscellaneous tasks. You shall help to wash uniforms and take care of the sick and injured. You shall work as your punishment."

Yan'er was touched. "Thank you, General! I will go and take care of the injured now. Thank you, General!"

Sheng Chumu did not say anything more and left the scene. *Ye Qiulang was luckier than him and found a girl that truly loved him. All he got was cold emotions. Fu Rou was even more flippant than a willow tree. He could give up everything for her but she won't give up everything for him. That was the reality!*

This misunderstanding...

Court Lady

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In the darkness before dawn, the nuptial room in Grand Prince Liang's Residence was lit up as if it was daytime. Grand Prince Liang stood beside the bed, his face was stoic. He glared at the white silk on the bed as if the white silk could change colour.

Lu Yingying grabbed onto the wedding blanket. She was sitting like a statue. There was no red stain on the silk. She knew what the consequence was and had been wishfully hoping. She never thought of doing something to deceive him.

"Tell me, who was it?" Grand Prince Liang finally blew up. Lu Yingying was definitely not going to say.

Grand Prince Liang's hand flew over for a slap. He roared, "Tell me who that adulterer is!" Without waiting for her to reply, he grabbed her hair and pulled her off the bed. "You are a broken flower and you still dare to covet the position of my consort? Does your Lu family think I am a fool?!"

Lu Yingying finally spoke up. "My brother and father do not know about this. Please do not implicate others, Your Highness."

Her words only angered him more. He pulled off his belt and started to hit her. "Who did you give your virginity to? Tell me! Tell me! Why are you not telling me?"

Lu Yingying turned her head away. She did not try to hide nor struggle. She allowed the belt to hit her over and over again. The pain slowly became numb but she did not make a sound.

Grand Prince Liang's hand had turned numb from hitting her. He furiously threw the belt aside and smashed down all the fragile things in the room before stomping out of the room.

The next day, Grand Prince Liang brought Lu Yingying into the palace to greet the Emperor and Empress. He thought about all the women he had encountered in the past and could not believe that his consort was not a virgin. This humiliation was unbearable and he desperately wanted to kill her. However, his Imperial Father had passed on and although Lu Yingying was in the wrong, she was a consort and the daughter of a Duke. Furthermore, the Emperor had bestowed this marriage on him. If he made matters big, everyone would lose face. Moreover, his Imperial Father had been so comforted before he passed on, he could not let his Imperial Father be humiliated. Hence, he decided to pretend to be a couple with this person in front of him.

After greeting the Emperor and Empress, Grand Prince Liang did not say much and Lu Yingying was silent as well. The Empress did not think anything was wrong and thought that Grand Prince Liang had settled down and was finally calm. Meanwhile, Lu Yingying was a new bride and might be feeling shy.

Empress Zhangsun gave a Child Bearing Guanyin to Lu Yingying. "Consort Liang, this Child Bearing Guanyin was given to me by the Grand Emperor when I married into the Qin Residence back then. Now that you have married into the Liang Residence, Grand Emperor will definitely be comforted up in heaven. Today, I am giving this Child Bearing Guanyin to you. I hope that the both of you will be in perfect harmony and give birth to children soon."

Lu Yingying stared blankly at the Child Bearing Guanyin. She did not reach out to receive it.

Empress Zhangsun was slightly surprised. "Consort Liang?"

Grand Prince Liang gritted his teeth silently before smiling. "My late

Imperial Father is in heaven. I will not disappoint Imperial Sister-in-law's hopes for us." He glanced at Lu Yingying's sleeve and lowered his voice, suppressing his emotions. "Aren't you going to quickly take it?"

Lu Yingying shivered before reaching out to take it.

In a split second, Fu Rou caught sight of the bruise on Lu Yingying's hand and frowned. Although Grand Prince Liang's character was disagreeable, he got along well with Lu Yunji and his son. There was no need for him to be so brutal towards his newly wedded wife.

Empress Zhangsun did not notice and smiled comfortingly. "Your Majesty, look. Getting married is really different. Within a night, Grand Prince Liang has become a lot more calm. It is not the first time that Consort Liang has entered the palace, yet she is so shy and reserved. However, as soon as Grand Prince Liang speaks, she listens obediently. Isn't this marital harmony?"

The Emperor smiled. "You should not make fun of Consort Liang's shyness and reservation."

Grand Prince Liang chuckled dryly. He spoke idly with them for a while before taking leave.

Only after seeing there was no one around them, Grand Prince Liang's face turned cold. "If not for late Imperial Father's intention for this marriage and I cannot let him be humiliated, I would have killed you last night. In the future, you are Consort Liang when you are out of the residence. However, as soon as you return to the Liang Residence, you are a bitch that is not even worthy of a servant."

Lu Yingying looked on as Grand Prince Liang swiped his sleeve and left. She did not care as she took her time to walk.

"Consort Liang." Fu Rou caught up to her. "I saw that you were not looking good. Did Grand Prince Liang..."

Lu Yingying lowered her eyes and cut her off. "There are many things to do after getting married. It is natural to be tired."

Fu Rou lowered her voice. "On the day that you rescued me when we

were at Cangshan Mountain, did Yan Zifang...”

“Fu Siyan!” Lu Yingying’s expression suddenly became fierce. “When you meet a consort, you should be greeting me. Without my permission, you may not speak so boldly.”

Fu Rou looked silently at Lu Yingying and bowed. “Greetings, Consort.”

However, Lu Yingying did not say a second word and walked past Fu Rou.

Fu Rou stood up and looked up. She felt that the figure in front of her was extremely weak. It was as if she was a falling leaf that had been ravaged by the autumn wind. However, after her multiple meetings with Lu Yingying, she knew that Lu Yingying was a tenacious woman. She was a woman that dared to love and hate. She was smart and no matter how many obstacles there were in her way, she could calmly get through them.

Three days later, Lu Yingying went to visit her maiden home. Naturally, Grand Prince Liang was not willing to accompany her but she did not care. As she faced her father and brother’s concern, she assured them that everything was alright. She did not mention anything about Grand Prince Liang abusing her. When she returned to the Liang Residence in the evening, there was no one to welcome her. The servants in the Liang Residence had always known how to read their master’s mood. As they saw him shout at her for the past three days and even hit her easily, no one saw her as the female master in the residence.

As she walked past the garden, she heard the sound of a bamboo flute. She saw Grand Prince Liang drink and entertain himself with Ruji, whom he favoured. Lu Yingying’s expression did not change as she continued forward until she reached the most deserted corner of the residence. Her living quarters had been shifted here. There was a pavilion filled with cobwebs, a house that had been left unused, a bed, a table and some daily necessities. If all the daily necessities were to be collected, it would not even fill a basket.

Lu Yingying changed her clothes before entering the pavilion and getting to work herself. She started a fire, boiled water and made tea. The Liang Residence's Madam Situ brought two maids into the house. Madam Situ lifted her head and looked scornfully at Lu Yingying down her nose.

"His Highness said that we have to take your jewellery and clothes once you return from your maiden home."

Lu Yingying pointed to a corner of the room as she flipped open a book and sipped some tea.

When Madam Situ entered the room, she saw that the clothes and jewellery had already been placed neatly in a tray. She ordered the maids to take them before walking out. Her expression was still filled with contempt. "It will be the best if Consort has a clear view of things. Oh right, His Highness is still waiting for you to attend to him. You don't have the leisure to read and drink tea."

Lu Yingying sighed. She did not even have a moment of rest as she returned to the garden that she had walked past.

The music and laughter had stopped. Ruji was seated on Grand Prince Liang's leg as she fed him with her mouth. Her soft bosom was half-exposed as she behaved charmingly and flirtatiously.

Grand Prince Liang glanced at Lu Yingying and tightened his grip on Ruyi's waist inappropriately. "You are like a chunk of wood and still need me to spell things out exactly. Quickly pour wine."

Lu Yingying saw the ambiguous scene in front of her but did not seem to care as she stepped up to pour wine. Grand Prince Liang took hold of the wine cup and suddenly pushed Ruyi away as he threw the cup at Lu Yingying. At the same time, he stood up and kicked her to the ground.

"How dare you serve me cold wine, bitch!"

Lu Yingying was disheveled as she crawled up. Her tone was cold. "The previous time, you said that you did not like to drink warm wine." *No matter what she did, it was always wrong because he deeply*

despised her.

“How dare you talk back!” Grand Prince Liang took out a whip and started to hit her. He would hit her entire body except for her face.

Even Ruji could not stand watching and persuaded him. “Please calm down, Your Highness. If you injure Her Highness...”

Grand Prince Liang spat at Lu Yingying. “Peh! I don’t see a consort here. All I see is a shameless bitch!”

Lu Yingying suffered his hits silently. The more she did not cry out, the angrier Grand Prince Liang got. He did not stop and continued hitting her until her clothes tore from the whip and exposed numerous bloody scars.

He bellowed, “Get lost! Tomorrow, I will be attending a banquet at the Eastern Palace. I will ask Lu Qi if he knows of your shameful deed. I want to murder you entire family!”

“I will take responsibility for my actions. My father and brother do not know about this. If they knew, how would they have allowed me to marry into the Liang Residence? I only wish to fulfil my promise to you and repay you for the help you gave my father and brother.” She spoke expressionlessly. She hugged her arms and staggered off.

Grand Prince Liang’s heart palpitated. *Did she really intend to repay his kindness?*

Poor Yingying... :(*sobs* She is a strong woman.

I know some of these chapters are really difficult/hard to read. But I urge you all to stay until the end! This novel is really good. Your emotions are going to be on a rollercoaster ride!

Court Lady

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Concubine Yan woke up from her afternoon nap. Yu He presented a letter to her.

After reading the letter, she spoke plainly. “Prince Zhao despised Qian Wenjing for his strict teaching method and collaborated with others to kill Qian Wenjing. Qian Wenjing found out about the plan and captured the person who instigated Prince Zhao. However, he helped Prince Zhao to hide it and did not report it to the Emperor.”

Yu He replied, “Tutor Qian’s personality is upright and fiery but his heart is soft.”

“He is a compassionate teacher, that is why Ge’er respects him so much.” Concubine Yan smiled. “It is Prince Zhao’s good fortune to receive Qian Wenjing’s assistance. My relationship with Concubine Xi is pretty good, I cannot use her son as a weakness. Hopefully, Prince Zhao knows what is best for him.” She returned the letter to Yu He.

An internal attendant came in to report that Concubine Xi had come to visit. Yu He frowned as he heard this and Concubine Yan saw his reaction.

At this moment, Concubine Xi walked in smiling brightly. Concubine Yan smiled as well. “Sister, how come you are free to visit me today?”

“My elder cousin, Wang Zuozhong, has arrived in Chang’an to report for duty. He has received the Emperor’s grace and was allowed to enter the palace to meet me.” Concubine Xi took a gift box from her personal maid. “In the past, I had Prince Zhao to talk to, to relieve my boredom. Ever since he has gone to Zhao County, it is much quieter at my place. It was rare to have a family member visit and I was naturally excited. My elder cousin brought a few boxes of almond biscuits for me. Sister, you might have seen a lot of these and don’t care for them. But these still carry the flavour of being brought from afar. Hence, I brought some for you to try.”

“This is such a rare item. You should present them to the Empress first.”

“I already sent two sets to Her Majesty. This box is for you.”

“Thank you.” It was only then did Concubine Yan nod and accept the biscuits.

Yu He stepped forward to receive the almond biscuits. Concubine Xi looked at Yu He.

“Is there something wrong?” Concubine Yan asked.

Concubine Xi replied, “My elder cousin saw Chief Yu when he visited the palace and said that Chief Yu looked like someone he had met before. I have never thought so but now that I hear him say it, I do think that Chief Yu does look familiar.”

Concubine Yan’s expression changed slightly as she put on a smile. “Sister, you are really funny. He is always moving about in the harem. Of course you would find him familiar after seeing him so many times. It would be weird if you did not recognise him.”

Concubine Xi thought about it. “You are right.”

Concubine Yan picked up a piece of almond biscuit and placed it in her mouth. She commented that it was very sweet. Concubine Xi sat for a while more before taking her leave. After she left, Concubine Yan stopped smiling.

Yu He was worried. “Your Highness, I am afraid that Concubine Xi

has found out where I am from.”

“That may not be. The fact that she could say it in front of me means that she has yet to remember.” A cold look flashed through Concubine Yan’s eyes. “However, when it comes to things like this, once there is a slight suspicion, it will turn into a disaster. Where is the letter that I passed you just now?”

Yu He gave it to her.

Concubine Yan pondered for a while as she held the letter. She then spoke coldly. “Go and find an Imperial Censor. Order him to tell the Emperor about what Prince Zhao did.”

A mother can flourish because of her child but she could also be worn out by them. With Prince Zhao down, Concubine Xi’s life would also be difficult.

Prince Zhao rebelled!

The Imperial Censor reported that Prince Zhao and his fellow officials had plotted to kill Qian Wenjing. Although the plot had been stopped in time by Qian Wenjing, the Emperor was still furious. He immediately ordered Prince Zhao and Qian Wenjing to return to Chang’an to explain what had happened. When Prince Zhao received the decree, he wanted to pretend to be sick so that he would not need to go. He did not expect Qian Wenjing to believe that he was truly sick and go ahead to Chang’an by himself. Prince Zhao thought that Qian Wenjing was rushing to Chang’an before him to complain about him and he chased after Qian Wenjing and killed him. He knew that the Emperor would not forgive him. Hence, he decided to just go all out as he brought troops with him to rebel.

In a fit of anguish, Prince Zhou requested for an army to suppress the rebel troops. The Crown Prince sang the same tune and recommended Lu Qi to lead the troops. The Emperor could not decide who to grant permission and said that they shall discuss it during the following morning’s court session.

When Prince Zhou left the morning court session, he started to drink to drown his sorrows. He would not listen to Concubine Yan's advice. To him, Qian Wenjing was a teacher as well as a father. He was the person that was the second closest to Prince Zhou after Prince Zhou's own parents.

"Give me more wine." The wine jar was empty and daylight had changed to moonlight. Prince Zhou continued to drink.

Someone brought him a bottle of wine and helped him to pour a drink. He smelt a familiar scent as he lifted his eyes to look. It was Fu Rou.

"Mother has already sent many people to tell me to stop drinking. You should give up telling me. Let me get drunk tonight." *He wanted to get drunk to forget all his sorrows.*

"I am not here to ask you to stop drinking. I am here to accompany you." Fu Rou sat down and poured herself a drink. She finished it in one gulp. "Although I did not formally become his apprentice, in my heart, I had already acknowledged him as my teacher after that night of teachings. Women are benevolent but they also have their own conduct. In the past, I had a lot of questions but Tutor was able to answer them all and enlightened me. I was thinking of getting him to advise me if I ever had the chance in the future. I never expected..."

She poured herself another cup and raised her cup to the moon. She poured the wine on the ground. "A drink for Tutor in heaven."

Prince Zhou followed her, pouring the drink on the ground to offer the spirits. He then drank another cup for himself. "When we drank that night, Tutor was drunk. When he left, he was still singing Cao Zhi's < < White Horse > > . To sacrifice one's life to visit another country in distress, to regard death as if to return...what an ominous song. It was as if he was hinting at today's end. If I knew this was going to happen, I would have tried all I can to make Tutor stay, even if it means falling out with the Crown Prince."

Fu Rou shook her head. "Your Highness, this is not an ominous song. This is Tutor's true feelings."

Prince Zhou had a sudden realisation. "Living for one's country and dying for one's country."

"He was teaching Your Highness and he had done what he preached. This is what makes him a true teacher." *Therefore, this was also what made her admire him greatly.*

"I am a weak student!" Prince Zhou was agitated. "I want to attack Qi City to avenge my tutor but I can't do anything about the Crown Prince's fear and Imperial Father also does not allow it."

Fu Rou was calm. "His Majesty must have his own considerations. No matter who leads the troops, they will seek justice for Tutor."

"I don't trust Lu Qi. I trust the Crown Prince even less. If the Crown Prince did not always try to go against me, Tutor would not have been sent to Prince Zhao and would not have died under Prince Zhao's hands. The Crown Prince has always been in contact with Prince Zhao through letters. Moreover, Lu Qi only knows how to fawn over the Crown Prince. If Lu Qi were to lead the troops, he would just be helping the Crown Prince. He will not care about avenging Tutor. Tomorrow morning, I want to ask Imperial Father for permission once more. Even if I cannot take command, I have to find someone that can avenge Tutor."

Fu Rou fell silent for a while. "If I may be so bold as to recommend someone."

Prince Zhou asked. "Who?"

"Sheng Chumu." *She always only had one person in mind.*

Prince Zhou slammed the table and stood up. He looked down coldly at her from up above. "You really disappoint me."

Fu Rou looked at him quietly.

"Aren't you here to get drunk with me? Aren't you here to reminisce your teacher? Fu Rou, you can use me at any time to help you and your lover except tonight!"

"Sheng Chumu and I are estranged." *She missed that person and her*

heart would always belong to him. However, she knew that his departure signalled his desire to break up with her. Hence, she was not going to force him.

“Then why did you still bring him up?” He did not believe her.

“Because amongst everyone I know, he is the best at fighting.” If she was selfish, she would not want Sheng Chumu to go to battle. However, the truth was the truth. “Your Highness, do you remember Sheng Chumu going out to war with Lu Yunji and wiping out all the enemy troops? However, Lu Yunji was the one that claimed credit. Lu Yunji even plotted against him and sent him to that death ground, believing that he would not survive. In the end, he made it back and even exposed the truth of Lu Yunji plundering the citizens. I have even personally witnessed him fighting against pirates, he pursued them relentlessly and will not give up until he obtains victory. He is this kind of person. Once he has taken on responsibility, he will carry it out to the end.”

Hearing Fu Rou mention this, Prince Zhou recalled everything. At least Sheng Chumu also hated Lu Yunji and Lu Qi.

Fu Rou then added, “Sheng Chumu may have many flaws, but during the most critical juncture, he never disappoints anyone.”

If you watch episode 34, the drama goes in more details over what happened regarding Prince Zhao and Qian Wenjing. Prince Zhao is one of the Emperor's sons and the son of Concubine Xi. Qian Wenjing, Prince Zhou's tutor, was sent to give him advice/help him become a better person (similar to how the Crown Prince has Zhan Xuanzhi as an advisor).

Court Lady

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Prince Han left the court. He described the events of today's court session to Consort Han lively and realistically.

“...the entire court was chaotic. Prince Zhou persisted in leading the troops himself to avenge Qian Wenjing. The Crown Prince insisted on not allowing Prince Zhou to go. He said that it was too dangerous for Prince Zhou to go to battle. He was worried about his younger brother. As soon as Prince Zhou saw that there was no hope, he turned and requested for Sheng Chumu to be the one to lead the troops. However, the Crown Prince said that Lu Qi was the most ideal person...”

Consort Han cut him off, “Speak simply. Don’t tell me about the Crown Prince and Prince Zhou. What is Imperial Father’s stand? Does our Chumu need to go to battle?”

Prince Han nodded sharply. “Yes.”

Consort Han waited for him to continue. Prince Han looked at her and grinned.

Consort Han was impatient. “That’s it?”

“Didn’t you want me to speak simply?” *To abide by her intentions is the greatest form of respect.*

Consort Han made a gesture that she was going to twist his ear. “Are you going to hurry and say it?”

Prince Han quickly continued, “The Crown Prince and Prince Zhou fought head to head, neither wanting to take a step back. Even Imperial Father started to have a headache. In the end, Imperial Father decided that both Lu Qi and Sheng Chumu were to lead the troops against Prince Zhao.”

Consort Han froze. “Both of them? Then who is the main command?”

“One will take the eastern route, one will take the western route.” Prince Han knew what she was worried about. “Consort, rest assured. Lu Qi has no control over Sheng Chumu. However, Sheng Chumu also has no control over Lu Qi. They are on equal footing.”

Consort Han still could not understand. “So is there a main commander?”

“How can there not be a main commander in battle? Imperial Father said that he was sending two generals, Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi, who are good at fighting. He will then send a person who is moral and upright to be the main commander to manage both the eastern and western route and to oversee the entire situation.”

“Why did you take so long to say the most important thing?” Consort Han rushed him. “So who did Imperial Father send to oversee the entire thing?”

Prince Han laughed until his face felt stiff. “The Crown Prince recommended me. Imperial Father has already released the Imperial Decree.”

Consort Han was in disbelief. “Didn’t you say that the Crown Prince did not allow Prince Zhou to go to battle because it would be too dangerous for Prince Zhou? Wasn’t the Crown Prince worried for his younger brother?”

Prince Han did not think deeply. “Yes.”

Consort Han was furious. “You are his biological younger brother. Why isn’t he worried about you? If you lose even a strand of hair, I

am going to pit myself against the Eastern Palace!”

Initially, it was just her and the Crown Princess that did not get along. Recently, even the Crown Prince was getting distant from Prince Han. She had thought that having some distance was good. After all, the Eastern Palace was like a hornet's nest, trouble would come at any time. Who would have known that the Crown Prince had no limit? He said that he wanted to protect his younger brother who was from a different mother yet he sent his own biological brother to battle? Was he mistaken?

Fu Rou responded to Consort Han's summon to visit Han Mansion. Prince Han had just set off and Consort Han was in low-spirits. Her eyes were slightly red as if she had just cried.

When Fu Rou was in Han Mansion, she knew how much Prince Han loved Consort Han. Although Consort Han could appear fierce, she was actually very meticulous and loved and protected Prince Han wholly. She admired their love and relationship.

She greeted, “Your Highness, you have summoned me. Do you have instructions for me?”

Consort Han walked down from her main seat and took Fu Rou's hand. “Don't behave so distant. I have not seen you for a while. You have grown skinnier. It is all because Chumu is immature and has caused you to be sad.”

“Your Highness, things are different now. Please do not link General Sheng Chumu and me together.”

“You don't mean what you say. If you do not want to be linked to him, then why did you ask Prince Zhou to recommend Sheng Chumu to the Emperor?” Consort Han's eyes were clear.

Fu Rou was startled. “Your Highness, how did you know it was me?”

“Prince Zhou has never got along with Sheng Chumu yet he recommended Sheng Chumu to lead the troops. There must be a reason. Other than you, I cannot think of anyone else.”

Fu Rou wanted to speak.

Consort Han raised her hand. "Take it as me owing you a favour. With Prince Zhao's revolt, it initially had nothing to do with us but now it allowed us to see someone clearly."

Fu Rou understood. "Is it the Crown Prince?"

As soon as she thought about the Crown Prince, Consort Han's anger surged and it was hard to control it. "Prince Han is good at literature studies but not at fighting. Everyone in court knows that he is a bookworm and pours all his attention into books. Composing some geography books is what he is good at. Just so that he can gain power, he sent Prince Han, someone who doesn't even know anything about battles, to be the main commander to suppress the rebel army. I don't know whether he has any conscience left. What if something bad happens? Prince Han is his biological brother! I want to see how the Crown Prince is going to face Imperial Mother after doing something like this!"

Fu Rou tried to convince her. "Your Highness must not go and see Her Majesty. Ever since the Cangshan Mountain incident, Her Majesty's illness has been recurring. The Imperial Physician has instructed that she cannot be agitated."

Consort Han sighed, "This is such a big matter. Even if I don't say it, do you think Imperial Mother will not find out?"

Empress Zhangsun cared about the Crown Prince more than anyone else. Because of this, she believed that the Crown Prince could rely most on his biological brothers. Prince Qin was still young whereas Prince Han was similar in age to the Crown Prince. Prince Han should be the Crown Prince's support. Who would have known that the two brothers would slowly become distant from each other.

Fu Rou seemed to hesitate. "Perhaps the Crown Prince has lingering fears. After all, the situation with Hong Yide had just passed..."

Consort Han raised her brows. "So what? Just because he suffered a little, he is going to fear his own brother while allowing Lu Yunji and his son to prance around in front of him?"

Fu Rou opened her mouth but did not say anything. *It did not matter if it was the Crown Prince or Prince Han, she should not interfere. She could sense a violent undercurrent starting in the palace, and to protect herself, she must try not to get involved.*

Prince Han is going to be the person overseeing Chumu and Lu Qi...
haha. What do you think will happen?

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Yan Zifang came to Belle Shop to ask Ma Hainiu something. He was shocked to see a long queue in front of the shop. He never expected Ma Hainiu and Lian Yan'er's business would end up doing so well.

When Ma Hainiu caught sight of Yan Zifang, she quickly handed over her customers to the shop's helpers. She pulled him to the tea house opposite the shop to talk. As soon as they sat down, the shop owner greeted them enthusiastically and even arranged for the best tea master to serve them tea. It was obvious that Ma Hainiu was a regular customer.

"You don't like Sheng Chumu anymore?" From what Yan Zifang observed, Ma Hainiu was handling transactions even winking at the tea master. She looked completely free of problems.

"I still like him." Ma Hainiu said it so casually that even she herself was slightly taken aback. She broke into a smile. "He belongs to himself and I belong to myself. Leader, do you have something for me?"

"I heard from Ah Hu that you frequently visit the houses of nobles. Do you know what happened between the Crown Prince and Prince Han?" *To anyone with a discerning eye, they could tell that the Crown Prince's move to give command to Prince Han was not for Prince Han's benefit.*

"The relationship between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion is not as harmonious as it seems from the outside. The Crown Prince recommended Prince Han as the main commander and Consort Han is furious because of it. She even complained. Unexpectedly, her complaints were heard by the people in the Eastern Palace and the Crown Princess found out. During the family banquet, the Crown Princess harped on the fact that she gave birth to a son to mock Consort Han. Consort Han is not someone who takes things as they are and she talked back to the Crown Princess." *Sure enough, Ma Hainiu knew the details.*

Yan Zifang asked plainly. "Did they fight?"

"How can they." Ma Hainiu pursed her lips. "The Empress coughed and the both of them immediately stopped arguing."

Yan Zifang nodded. "With the Empress around, everything is still stable. How is the Empress' condition?"

Ma Hainiu answered smoothly. "She's barely surviving."

Yan Zifang raised his brows. "Is your source reliable?"

"Physician He, who is from the Imperial Physicians, has a favourite concubine and she was the one that said it. I made her an Agate Peacock-patterned long chain and only charged her half the price. We are now sisters who do not hide anything from each other. Now, the madams and ladies from all the noble and wealthy houses in Chang'an are our Belle Shop's loyal customers. Is there anything that they can hide from me?"

"Then how about Grand Prince Liang's residence?" This was the real reason for Yan Zifang's visit.

"I was about to tell you about Liang Residence's biggest secret." Ma Hainiu lowered her voice. "Consort Liang is not favoured."

Yan Zifang was not surprised. "What kind of big secret is this? To a frivolous and fickle man like Grand Prince Liang, it is normal for his wife to not be favoured."

Ma Hainiu raised her index finger and waved it. "Grand Prince Liang

treats Consort Liang like a lowly-servant. He abuses her by whipping her three times a day, as if they were meals.”

Yan Zifang’s eyes hardened. “What?”

“Grand Prince Liang forbids anyone in the residence from talking about it. Anyone who spills the secret will be killed. The more secretive they are, the more curious I became. Hence, I used several beautiful jewels to bribe a maid from the Liang Residence to tell me the secret. Don’t look at how glamorous Consort Liang may appear on the outside. She is actually severely abused in the Liang Residence. She has numerous scars on her body. Everything she eats and wears are worse than what is given to a normal servant.” Ma Hainiu had just opened her mouth before she recalled an etiquette she learned and she lifted her sleeve to cover her mouth as she laughed. “Oh, it makes me so happy to think of how unlucky Lu Yunji’s daughter is. Isn’t this retribution? Ha--hehehe!”

She laughed for a while before realising that her leader, sitting in front of her, was emitting cold air. She stopped laughing. “Leader, are you okay?”

“Why does Grand Prince Liang treat his consort this way?” *Was it his fault?*

“She slept with a man.” *She never thought that the noble daughter of a duke would do something like that.*

“Slept with a man?” *It was his fault!*

“A wild man.” Ma Hainiu shrugged. “The maid told me that when Grand Prince Liang was consummating their marriage with her, he found out that she was not a virgin. He was so furious, and beat her up on the spot. When Grand Prince Liang was hitting her, that maid happened to be guarding the door and heard everything clearly. When Grand Prince Liang asked who the bastard was, she gritted her teeth and refused to say. Even after Grand Prince Liang beat her half to death, she did not rat him out. General, who do you think is the male adulterer that slept with Lu Yunji’s daughter?”

Yan Zifang suddenly raised his voice. “How would I know?”

Ma Hainiu did not take notice. "To be able to steal the virginity of a duke's daughter and even make her willingly keep it a secret. This male adulterer is not simple. I think he's..."

Yan Zifang stood up. "That is enough! You keep talking about male adulterers here and there. You are a woman that has yet to be married, how can you blabber on like this?" He took out a pouch from his sleeve and threw it at Ma Hainiu. "This is for you."

Ma Hainiu opened it and saw gold glistening at her. "Wah! Leader, you are too generous. We are a family. You shouted at me slightly and gave me so much jewels to compensate me. How can I accept it?"

"Who said that I was giving it to you?" *He even had a share in Belle Shop. Why would he give her money?* "Isn't your Belle Shop best at making jewellery? Help me make a pearl dress. Use high quality pearls."

"This little bit of money is not enough." *Business was business.*

"I will get you enough." Yan Zifang instructed, "Continue finding out more from the Liang Residence."

Like what Fu Rou said, Lu Yingying was innocent. No matter how drunk he was that night, he was the one that wronged her and turned her into who she is now. He could not watch her get tortured. At least, it cannot be because of him.

Outside of Qi City, huge tents were set up, filled with troops ready to suppress Prince Zhao. They looked like white mushrooms covering the entire area. Except that under this organised exterior, people's feelings were not in sync; especially the two lead commanders. Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi were fighting over everything, arguing with each other at every sentence. Prince Han, who was caught in the middle, was so exasperated that he just wanted to directly die in battle.

They were currently discussing how to attack Qi City. Lu Qi pointed at the sand table. "Here, here and here. We have to place soldiers at these three places to cut off Prince Zhao's reinforcement army."

Sheng Chumu just wanted to point out his faults. “You missed out this point.”

Lu Qi was stunned as he realised Sheng Chumu was right. Lu Qi merely rubbed his nose and continued, “Your Highness, you have to send two thousand people here as well.”

“Okay.” Prince Han felt that it would be best for him to talk now. “Then what about Qi City?”

Sheng Chumu volunteered, “I will take charge of Qi City.”

Lu Qi went against him. “Sheng Chumu, we haven’t even started fighting and you are already trying to fight for merits?”

Sheng Chumu had to argue back. “The fact is I am better than you in attacking cities.”

Lu Qi snorted, “Wasn’t it just Nine Pillar City? You act so arrogantly. Those that don’t know would have thought that you defeated Chang’an.”

Sheng Chumu faked a laugh. “What do you want?”

Lu Qi sneered, “We have to at least attack with two routes.”

Sheng Chumu came to a realisation. “So the one who wants to fight for merits is you?”

Lu Qi was not willing to appear weak. “It is the Emperor’s intention to use both the east and west route to converge the attack. Why? Do you want to defy him?”

“Yes, yes, we should listen to the Emperor. Then let us use both the east and west route to converge the attack.” Prince Han pointed at the sand table, sticking to what was originally planned. “How about this? Lu Qi, you will be in-charge of the eastern route while Sheng Chumu will take the western route. You will each take five thousand soldiers and attack Prince Zhao’s rebel army from the east and west. Will this be possible?”

On an extremely rare occasion, Sheng Chumu and Lu Qi both gave

the same expression as they looked wordlessly at Prince Han.

“Why? Are you both still not satisfied?” Prince Han thought that it was very fair.

“Brother-in-law....” Sheng Chumu looked helplessly. “You are pointing in the wrong direction.”

“Oh. This sand table has so many bumps, it is easy to get confused. Normally, when I look at maps on books, I am very clear.” Prince Han hurried to point at a side. “Lu Qi, you will take charge of the western route and Sheng Chumu will take the eastern route.” He snuck a look at Sheng Chumu’s face.

Sheng Chumu laughed dryly and nodded.

After Lu Qi left, Prince Han held Sheng Chumu back. “Now that the outsider is gone, let us have a private word.”

Sheng Chumu asked. “What word?”

“Two important things. The first thing.” Prince Han took out a thick letter and handed it to Sheng Chumu. “A letter your sister wrote to you.”

Sheng Chumu took out the letter and read it quickly. He then put it away properly. Prince Han commented, “There are so many pages and you are already done reading them?”

Sheng Chumu sighed, “After writing so much over and over again, she was only talking about one thing. If you do not reach back home in one full piece, my sister will take it out on me.”

Prince Han laughed. “That’s right. Your sister cares about me the most.”

Sheng Chumu nagged, “You both are already an old couple. Can you not be so cheesy?”

“It is natural for a man and woman to love each other. In the future, when you get married you will understand. Chumu ah, when we return to Chang’an after this battle, you can’t be discouraged just

because of a woman and keep going to the borders. Look at you. You are tanned and have gotten skinnier. You don't look like how you were back then..."

Sheng Chumu cut him off. "I thought that you had two things to say? What is the second thing?"

"Oh, the second thing." Prince Han spoke lightly. "My Imperial Mother emphasised that we must capture Prince Zhao alive."

Sheng Chumu was stunned for a moment before shouting, "Why are you only saying such an important thing now?"

Prince Han felt like Chumu was making a big deal. "It is not too late to say it now. After all, we haven't attacked yet."

Sheng Chumu was flabbergasted. "Whose stupid idea was it to make you the main commander? Capturing alive versus capturing regardless whether he is alive or dead is two completely different stories. We have to reconsider our plans and formations."

However, upon considering further, Sheng Chumu knew why the Empress emphasised that Prince Zhao needed to be captured alive. This time, it was Prince Han that was leading the army. If Prince Zhao were to die, despite Prince Zhao having committed a crime, Prince Han would still have to bear the burden of killing his younger brother.

Seeing him in deep thought, Prince Han waited a while before asking. "Chumu, is it more difficult to capture him alive?"

Sheng Chumu stared at his Brother-in-law. *This person's appearance must follow his heart. They were both big and fat!*

lol Prince Han can't tell the difference between west and east.

Hmm. I wonder what Yan Zifang is going to do now that he knows Lu Yingying is being abused!! Do you think he regrets it?

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Fu Rou visited Concubine Xi on the Empress' orders. Because of Prince Zhao's rebellion, the Emperor was furious and Concubine Xi had been implicated and was under house arrest. Concubine Xi was resolved as well. Her son was at fault and she no longer wanted to live. She had starved herself for several days.

Yang Bo had been taking care of Concubine Xi. Although Chief Cao instructed that no one was allowed to visit Concubine Xi, he still let Fu Rou in.

Cold wind blew through the windows and the floor was cold. In the past, her palace had been bright. Now, it was solemn and dark. Fu Rou walked around a Hundred Flower Screen as she recalled Concubine Xi instructing her to embroider one of the orchid branches with great detail. She guessed that Concubine Xi liked orchids the most. However, in the palace, the Empress had to be the most outstanding and Concubine Yan was favoured by the Emperor. There was no place for Concubine Xi to show off.

Meanwhile, Concubine Xi was kneeling, her hair uncombed and her clothes were simple. She was like a high-spirited noble lady that had lost her husband and son, about to topple at any time. She appeared pitiful as she trembled in fear. There was nothing she could do. Unfortunately, it seemed like she was not going to live until she was old.

“Your Highness.” Fu Rou looked at the untouched food on the table. “You should eat something.”

Concubine Xi did not look at Fu Rou. “I only have one son. You’er was adorable when he was young. He had a soft pink face and was smart and loveable. I remember the first time he rode a horse. I was so afraid that he would fall down from the horse. When he sat on the horse, my heart kept pounding until his both feet finally touched the ground again. Now, the Emperor has sent out troops to kill him. He can no longer return to Chang’an and see me. In the future, we can only meet in dreams.”

“I don’t know how Prince Zhao will take responsibility for his actions after this battle or how the Emperor will punish him, however, I know that Your Highness still has a chance of meeting Prince Zhao. If Your Highness continues to starve yourself and faints before Prince Zhao reaches Chang’an, who are you going to meet?”

Concubine Xi suddenly raised her head. “You are saying...that he can return to Chang’an alive?”

“Yes.” Fu Rou was certain. “I heard the Empress emphasise to Prince Han to be careful not to hurt Prince Zhao when he attacks Qi City. She said to make sure that he is alive.”

“Are you speaking the truth?” Concubine Xi’s face lit up before worry washed over her once again. “Troops are fierce and the battleground is dangerous. You’er is very stubborn. Even if the Empress has asked Prince Han to spare him, Prince Han may not be able to do it. After all, a sword has no eyes.”

“Prince Han can definitely do it.” Fu Rou was certain.

“How are you so sure?” Concubine Xi needed two doses of confirmation.

“Because there is someone capable by Prince Han’s side.” She had boundless confidence in Sheng Chumu.

The “capable” Sheng Chumu was about to cause Prince Han’s head to

crack open.

Although this was Prince Han's first time as a main commander, it might very well be his last. He was not going to die by his battle plans but he was going to die as a sacrificial victim because of Sheng Chumu's lack of fear of death. If he were to carry his younger brother-in-law's ashes back to Chang'an, Consort Han was definitely going to kill him. It was true that Prince Han did not know how to go to battle and could even read the sand table wrongly, but he had read a lot of books. He had glanced through several battle plans before but he had never seen someone go to battle like Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu had taken a hundred men to scout and bumped into Prince Zhao's army of over a few thousand men. Good lad. Not only did he not run, he even attacked directly, using some Long Snake Formation. He managed to obtain victory even though he had been outnumbered. Yet, he continued to chase the remainder of the reinforcement army all the way to Qi City. That group, along with Sheng Chumu, were covered in blood when they returned to camp. Prince Han's soul almost left his body in fright when he saw them.

Today, they were attacking Qi City.

Sheng Chumu had a hundred different tricks up his sleeves. The first was to fire a huge arrow to cunning people that instigated Prince Zhao to kill Qian Wenjing. This threw Prince Zhao into a frenzy and he threw all caution to the wind as he shot eight rounds of arrows, using up the entire stash of arrows in the army's storage. He did not know that Sheng Chumu had already calculated the trajectory and none of his arrows would hit. Using the second huge arrow, he sent a letter to Prince Zhao to warn him that his troops were amongst the reinforcement army that had escaped into Qi City. He also informed Prince Zhao that another despicable official of his had resold the grain in Prince Zhao's stockpile for a profit. Very soon, the people in his city would starve. However, he promised to treat anyone who surrendered with respect and not hurt them. Sheng Chumu surmised that Prince Zhao was obstinate yet timid. With Prince Zhao's personality of not using his brains, Sheng Chumu could sweet talk him. In addition to that, Sheng Chumu would drive a wedge amongst the people in Qi City, stirring up chaos. Amongst the chaos, there were actually people who came out of the city to surrender and

helped to open the city gates. Sheng Chumu did not suffer a single casualty on his side.

Meanwhile, Lu Qi was attacking the West Gate. He did not have so many tricks and had just attacked directly. Guarding a city was easy but attacking one was difficult. He fought until sweat mixed with blood and had just reached the entrance of the West Gate when he was surrounded by Prince Zhao's troops.

Fu Tao had followed Lu Qi to attack. Although his person was in camp, his heart was somewhere else. He had one ear on the West Gate and one ear on the East Gate. He felt as if the shouting was all coming from their side. He had witnessed Sheng Chumu's abilities before and was wondering what smart idea his teacher had this time. He hated that he could not enjoy himself with Sheng Chumu.

Fu Tao was distracted and his opponents were putting their lives on the line. His sword was knocked out of his hand and his enemy was about to pierce the sword through his heart when his enemy's chest got pierced through instead. He never would have thought Lu Qi would be the person that would rescue him.

Lu Qi handed Fu Tao's sword back to him. "On a battlefield, your weapon is your life. Don't lose it again."

Lu Qi turned to continue fighting. Fu Tao's feelings were complicated as he stared at Lu Qi's back. His grip tightened on his sword. With just a single stroke, he could immediately get his revenge.

He bellowed, "Attack!"

Lu Qi was slightly startled as he turned and saw Fu Tao charging towards him with his sword stretched out. His murderous aura filled the air and his sword was filled with energy. Without waiting for him to blink, the sword gleamed as it brushed past his body. It pierced through the enemy that had snuck up behind. He had just saved Fu Tao and Fu Tao had now saved him.

Lu Qi smiled. "Thanks, Bro."

All of a sudden, the enemy's horn blared and the enemy troops

retreated. Lu Qi and Fu Tao found it strange. A messenger came to report that the city gates were open.

Lu Qi looked at the West Gate which was still tightly shut. “No, it is still closed.”

The messenger soldier was excited. “Not the West Gate! The East Gate! The East Gate has opened!” A fire burned in Lu Qi’s heart. “Sheng Chumu attacked faster than me?”

“General Sheng did not mobilise the troops to attack. Someone in the city betrayed them and opened the city gates to let him in.”

Lu Qi fumed, “Ridiculous! We are fighting for our lives here to control Prince Zhao’s main army yet he has it so easy.” *He did not think that he was the one that actually had it easy.*

Fu Tao sighed internally. *As expected of his teacher’s ability to use troops like magic.*

Lu Qi lowered his voice, “Xi Tao, once we entered Prince Zhao’s Residence, go search Prince Zhao’s study room and bedroom. If you see any letters written by the Crown Prince to Prince Zhao, take them all and pass them to me.”

Fu Tao could only lower his head and listen obediently to orders.

I always find Prince Han so funny. lol

Court Lady

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Sheng Chumu led troops to barge into Prince Zhao's Residence. As soon as they entered, they saw a huge pile of firewood on a tall platform in the hall. Prince Zhao held a fire as he stood in front of the firewood. The remainder of Prince Zhao's troops surrounded the platform like an iron hoop. Beneath the platform, the corpses of Prince Zhao's concubines, internal attendants and officials were lying flat on the ground. They had taken poison. Whether they were willing or not, there was only one outcome.

"Your Highness, what are you trying to do?" Sheng Chumu already knew.

Prince Zhao's eyes lost hope and were slightly crazy. "I like grand heroic gestures like shooting tigers and capturing wolves. Even if I cannot live, I have to die grandly."

"Why?" Sheng Chumu was calm.

"Rebellion is an unforgivable crime. Even if I return to Chang'an, only death awaits me. Since I am going to die anyway, I would rather be the one to finish myself off!"

"Your Highness, please wait. I still have something to say." His brother-in-law's words of capturing Prince Zhao alive kept nagging in his mind.

Prince Zhao already knew that he would lose out when it came to Sheng Chumu. “I know you are a crafty person. Don’t even think about asking me to get off this platform! Let me tell you. Not only is there firewood, I am also covered in oil. I am determined to die here!”

“When did I say I was going to change your determination to die? You are right. Rebellion is an unforgivable crime. Even if I lie to you now and say that you will be able to live even after being captured to Chang’an, you won’t believe me.” Sheng Chumu turned back and asked for a torch. He took out a letter from his sleeve. “Before I came to Qi City, Concubine Xi requested for me to deliver a letter to Your Highness. I accepted it in a moment of sympathy.”

Behind Sheng Chumu, his assistant commander, Fan Yingcai, and soldier, Ye Qiulang, saw the words “To: Brother Chumu” written clearly on the letter. They exchanged glances, a helpless look on their faces.

However, Prince Zhao was in no position to take notice of their expressions. “Mother wrote me a letter?”

Sheng Chumu waved the fire torch and burned the letter. Prince Zhao was furious. “How dare you burn the letter my mother wrote for me?”

“I have already burned it. Is there a need to get agitated? After all, you and your mother are about to meet in the afterlife. When you meet, you can talk to her in the netherworld. That is all you will be able to do anyway.” *He was going to see if this person had any filial piety in him.*

Prince Zhao froze before shouting, “No, I am guilty but my mother is innocent!”

“Concubine Xi is innocent? How can that be? The entire Chang’an knows that Concubine Xi cooperated with you to rebel. With Concubine Xi’s family as backing, it is the only reason why you could be so bold as to kill Qian Wenjing and raise an army.” *This was nonsense that he made up.*

“No, no! My rebellion army has nothing to do with my mother or uncle’s family!” Prince Zhao waved the torch he was holding wildly.

“Your Highness, please do not be agitated. Hold the torch properly. If you accidentally set yourself on fire, a dead person cannot testify.”

Prince Zhao muttered, “A dead person cannot testify?”

“Now, other than you, who else would be able to tell the Emperor the truth of the entire rebellion? If you tell the Emperor the truth, the Emperor is brilliant and he would be able to make a decision on whether Concubine Xi was involved or not. But all these are useless. Since you have already decided to die, nothing will change your mind.”

Prince Zhao let out a long wail as he finally got off the platform and allowed the soldiers to tie him up.

At this moment, Lu Qi walked in and gestured secretively to Fu Tao. Fu Tao turned into another corridor by himself.

Sheng Chumu pretended not to notice and spoke in a mocking tone, “General Lu, you came just in time. I have already done all the difficult things and all that is left for you is to gather the remnants.”

Lu Qi snarled in response, “If not for my troops battling it out at West Gate, how would you have entered the city so easily?” Looking at the dejected Prince Zhao, he said, “I thought that since Prince Zhao decided to rebel, you must have had a realisation. I never expected you to be so fearful of death.”

Sheng Chumu knew that the reason why the Crown Prince recommended Prince Han was because he could not stand how Prince Han was favoured. He wanted to make Prince Han become infamous for killing his own brother. Lu Qi chose to stand on the Crown Prince’s side and naturally wished for Prince Zhao to die.

Sheng Chumu could not be bothered to get through to him. He saw the pile of corpses and suddenly asked, “Where is their Chief Imperial Guard, Jisun Chenxin?”

Sheng Chumu did not go into battle blindly. He had investigated his

enemy's main force and general thoroughly. Moreover, Jisun Chenxin was one of the Crown Prince's men.

Sheng Chumu found someone to question. He found out that Jisun Chenxin had left three thousand elite troops to Douzi Ridge. However, when he thought deeper, he did not think it was possible. All the routes to Douzi Ridge had been cut off.

Lu Qi found it strange as well. "Three thousand elite troops. If they did not go to Douzi Ridge, where could they have gone?"

Sheng Chumu suddenly exclaimed as he ran out. "This is bad. Prince Han!"

He and Lu Qi had attacked from two different routes and the base camp had been left empty. Jisun Chenxin was going to attack Prince Han!

Outside Chang'an, red leaves were blown by the wind, shining in brilliant autumn colours. What was more outstanding than the red leaves were the various colourful tents; they looked like wild flowers that bloomed in the mountains.

The Emperor and Empress were out on an autumn excursion. This was because the Empress' health seemed to have improved slightly and the Emperor wanted to bring her out to relax. He even invited high-ranking officials to bring along their family members. With the natural stream as a divider, men and women each toured half the mountain range.

Although Consort Han had been invited, she intentionally distanced herself from Empress Zhangsun. She really did not want to see the Crown Princess' proud face. After the Crown Princess gave birth to a prince, the Crown Prince had gone through the Hong Yide case. There were people surrounding and taking care of the Crown Princess as she had finally made it through all the troubles. However, Consort Han detested that she kept creating obstacles for the Han Mansion behind the scenes as well as in broad daylight. The Crown Princess was selfish and did not care about the relationship between the biological brothers nor between sister-in-laws. She was short-sighted.

In a nearby tent, several noble ladies were talking loudly about Consort Liang. They did not know that Lu Yingying and Consort Han were in the same tent. They spoke about how Consort Liang did not smile nor speak freely and did not know how to flatter others. They also said that she had a strange personality and did not interact with anyone. She was just a duke's daughter but after she married the Grand Prince, she became arrogant and haughty.

Consort Han heard everything clearly. However, she saw that Lu Yingying's expression did not change in the slightest. She praised Lu Yingying in her heart. In her position, she should not care nor be wavered by what others thought about her.

After a while, Lu Yingying stood up.

"Consort Liang, where are you going?"

Lu Yingying's face remained cold. "It is a little stuffy sitting here. I am going to take a walk."

Consort Han nodded. "That's good. Remember that there will be an acrobatics show soon and the Empress might summon us."

Lu Yingying acknowledged before walking out.

The water in the stream was so clear, the bottom could be seen easily. Lu Yingying squatted by the side as she saw little fishes fighting to swim upstream. She just wanted to be washed away by the current and float right out of Chang'an, all the way to Guangzhou and into the vast ocean.

She did not blame anyone, including Grand Prince Liang. However, if she could choose, she would have chosen not to listen to her father back then when he asked her to become the Crown Princess. At least her days would have been peaceful.

A shadow of an eagle appeared across the water. Lu Yingying turned back and found Yan Zifang standing behind her. She immediately stood up and spoke accusingly, "The beginning of autumn is celebrated by a hanging curtain as a boundary between men and women. How dare you cross over?"

One corner of Yan Zifang's mouth turned up. "I am a man that likes to cross over. I thought you knew that."

"I know that you are a cowardly man." She walked away as she said this.

"I heard the Grand Prince Liang has been mistreating you."

"Yes." She halted in her steps and answered honestly.

"Do you need my help?"

"Yes." *She might as well.*

"How can I help?" *He would try his best.*

"Leave everything behind and take me away. I want you to not hesitate even if we would be homeless, have to resort to begging and are chased by Grand Prince Liang's men to the ends of the earth and were to die horribly." She suddenly smiled.

"...I can't do it." *She knew he would not be able to do it, so why did she smile?*

"Then castrate yourself and not go near any women for my sake. Only if you cut off having children and grandchildren then can I feel comforted." She smiled even deeper.

"...I can't do that." *She was playing with him. He could tell.*

"Men..." She continued walking forward but he suddenly hugged her from behind. Ignoring how she was struggling, he lifted her hand as her sleeve rolled down, exposing the various bruises on her skinny wrist. It was cruel.

Yan Zifang was stunned. At the same time, anger rose within him!

Lu Yingying took the chance to escape as she turned around and slapped him. "How dare you!"

The corners of his lips split open as Yan Zifang tasted blood. He did not move to wipe it away. "You hit really hard."

Lu Yingying slowly neaten her outfit as she glanced at him loftily. She looked aloof and untouchable. “Yan Zifang, let me tell you the truth. Now that things have come to this, you are not worthy of me. I am now Grand Prince Liang’s wife and shall die along with him.” She turned sharply and walked away without looking back.

Yan Zifang stood on the spot. For the first time ever, he felt as if his heart had been cut by a knife. It was a completely different feeling from when he had been rejected by Fu Rou. The feeling was foreign and made him feel helpless.

I highly recommend watching [episode 36](#). Haha. The fight scene was pretty epic. And you can watch Yingying slap Yan Zifang too!

There are more scenes with Prince Zhao, and you could see how Chumu got them to open the East gate as well.

Court Lady

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“Brother-in-law!”

Prince Han was sitting unstably on his horse. As he watched his guards get killed one by one, he had lost hope on escaping. However, when he heard this call, he came to a sudden realisation. When fighting wars, capable people like Sheng Chumu were needed. What capable people could do that incapable people could not, was to make a fatty a main commander.

“Chumu! Chumu! You are finally here!” Prince Han was so overwhelmed with emotions, he almost cried. However, when he turned back he realised that Sheng Chumu was alone on his horse. *Eh? Where is the huge army? Where are the elite troops? And what about the small group of soldiers that Sheng Chumu always brought around with him? Why were they all missing!*

“Where are the rest?” *Okay, maybe he did not understand military strategy and could not decipher this strategy.*

“It is just me.” Sheng Chumu cut off an enemy’s head with one strike. He was even smiling. “Brother-in-law, thank goodness you are alright.”

“No, why is it just you?” *Was this brat trying to test the limits? The previous time, he used over a hundred soldiers to defeat a few thousand soldiers. Was he going to go solo this time? Even then, don’t bet on his*

life!

“My horse is the fastest one.” *Alas, the thousand-mile horse that he stole from Lu Qi was useful.*

“Aiyo! You are alone. Why did you barge in and die with me? I am very touched but what is going to happen to your sister? She can’t lose both her husband and her younger brother!”

He had to at least ensure that Prince Han returned home safely. As the saying goes, a wife follows her husband after marriage. As the younger brother, he could take a step back.

“Brother-in-law, don’t say such unlucky stuff!” Sheng Chumu seemed to be laughing as he spoke. However, he fought with no mercy as his actions were faster and fiercer than anyone else. Soon, he fought through a bloody path. How could the soldiers keep up with him? As they tried to fight, they were soon left behind.

“Very good, come at me!” Sheng Chumu fought his way out. When he turned back, eh? Prince Han was still surrounded. He had no choice but to fight his way back in. “Brother-in-law, be more swift.”

Prince Han laughed bitterly, “Do you think everyone is like you and charge forward without a care for your life? Look at you. You have a cut on your face because you don’t dodge!”

“Stop talking nonsense. Brother-in-law, follow me closely this time.” The physical pain distracted him from the pain in his heart.

“Oh oh!” Prince Han nodded rapidly.

The same route, the same enemies. Sheng Chumu fought brutally once again. When he finally fought his way out, he looked for Prince Han and did not know whether to laugh or to cry.

Prince Han was still surrounded as he turned on the spot and shouted, “Chumu! Leave! Don’t come back and sacrifice yourself! You...you you better not!”

Sheng Chumu fought his way in for the third time. Prince Han stared at his ribs in fright. “You...blood...so much blood...”

Sheng Chumu looked down. There was a cut at his ribs. "When did I get cut? No wonder it feels like I can't use my full strength."

Prince Han's mouth gaped open. "You are pissing me off!" *He finally understood. This brat had chosen to go to the border to commit suicide.*

"Brother-in-law, don't be too moved." Sheng Chumu did not seem to care. "If you cannot return home in one piece, Elder Sister will kill me. I do not want to deal with her nagging."

At this moment, Jisun Chenxin led a group of elite troops to join the fight.

All of Prince Han's troops were either injured or dead. Moreover, they did not have the advantage in numbers to begin with. In addition, Jisun Chenxin wanted to capture Prince Han to use him as a bargaining chip for his own life and was extremely fierce. No matter how good Sheng Chumu was at fighting, he was still made out of flesh and suffered many injuries. When his horse was killed, he had been tilted to the side when he was suddenly stuck in the shoulder and collapsed to the ground. Prince Han was dismounted as well.

"Brother-in-law, I am sorry. I cannot send you back in one piece." Sheng Chumu laughed bitterly.

Jisun Chenxin was about to capture Prince Han when the horn signalling the Tang army sounded. Dense black dots appeared outside the camp. He knew that he had lost his advantage and quickly pulled on his reins, escaping as quickly as possible.

Sheng Chumu lay flat on the floor as he panted heavily. As he looked at Lu Qi's face, he was extremely unhappy. "Are you a woman? Did you sway your hips as you made your way here?"

"Where is my precious horse?" Lu Qi looked around only to spot the horse's corpse. "Oi, you owe me."

Prince Han sat up and pounced onto Sheng Chumu. "Chumu! Are you okay? Are you severely injured? Nothing can happen to you! You can't leave me behind! If anything were to happen to you, your elder sister will not forgive me!"

Sheng Chumu struggled to open his mouth. “Brother-in-law, you are very heavy. Even a perfectly healthy human will die when you lie on them.”

Prince Han laughed embarrassedly, “Haha, I am sorry.”

Lu Qi rolled his eyes. *These two people really were a joke.*

On this day, Fu Rou was telling Prince Qin the story of Jing Ke’s attempt at assassinating Emperor Qin. Empress Zhangsun sat by the side with her eyes closed and resting.

Prince Qin said, “Jing Ke is a true hero.”

Fu Rou asked, “Then what about Crown Prince Dan?”

Prince Qin thought about it. “He was a hero too. He did not back down from the State of Qin’s might and tried to wash away the humiliation although he failed in the end. In the future, I want to be this kind of hero.”

Fu Rou fell silent for a moment. “I once read a collection of notes from the Han Dynasty. In it, there was a passage called < <Yandanzi> > . It mentioned Crown Prince Dan’s attempt to send someone to assassinate Emperor Qin. It was mentioned that after Crown Prince Dan got the idea of using an assassin to kill Emperor Qin, he wrote a letter to his teacher Qu Wu and asked him what he thought of the idea.”

Prince Qin became curious. “Oh, then what did the teacher say?”

Fu Rou replied, “People who indulge in their own way of thinking is the greatest obstruction to moral conduct. People who indulge in their own desires will harm their own nature.”

When Empress Zhangsun heard this, she opened her eyes. She also wanted to hear how Fu Rou would explain this.

“A person who indulges in their own spur of a moment thinking will go against moral conduct. People who indulge in their own desires

will hurt their own inherent nature. Qu Wu did not approve of Crown Prince Dan's idea. He believed that for someone who wanted to achieve big things, he should not be placing his hopes on something like an assassination. Even if he wanted revenge, he should follow the right path and try to strengthen the State of Yan's might and collaborate with other states to attack State Qin. However, Crown Prince Dan did not listen and used Jing Ke to attack Emperor Qin. In the end, they failed. Jing Ke was dead, Crown Prince Dan died and State Yan was conquered by State Qin."

"Your Highness, as the responsibility on your shoulders grows, the more you cannot give in to the spur of a moment ideas. Be it taking revenge or trying to erase a humiliation. Once you step down the wrong path, it will hurt your inherent nature and it will be too late for regrets."

People should be upright and take the correct path. This was also her principle that she conformed to and was not willing to compromise.

Prince Qin had a sudden realisation. "Fu Siyan, I understand. I should not be afraid when I meet an obstacle. I must have a strong resolution when I am humiliated or faced with hostility and not go astray."

"You are absolutely right." Fu Rou smiled.

Empress Zhangsun suddenly spoke, "Prince Qin, from now on you should not address her as Fu Siyan."

Fu Rou looked at Empress Zhangsun in confusion.

Empress Zhangsun smiled. "You should address her as Teacher."

Fu Rou bowed. "I do not dare."

Empress Zhangsun did not allow her to reject. "I said you will be a teacher so you shall be a teacher."

In the palace, people may start off kind. They would then slowly develop ulterior motives and may passively or actively start losing themselves. However, Fu Rou had always held on to her courage and intelligence. She has never wavered because of power and was extremely precious.

All of a sudden, an internal attendant reported loudly, “Your Majesty, Prince Han has returned victorious. He has managed to capture Prince Zhao alive and will return to court in a few days' time.”

Empress Zhangsun was delighted. “Great, great!”

Prince Qin saw that Fu Rou’s eyes seemed to sparkle like stars. He did not know that that was also a way of expressing one’s happiness.

lol Prince Han is so funny. Guys, I really recommend watching episode 36 so you can watch the fight scene (especially the part when Prince Han was on the horse with just Chumu protecting him).

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On the day that Prince Han returned to Chang'an, tens of thousands of people filled the streets. The citizens were cheering and shouting "Long live Prince Han". It made the Crown Prince unhappy. The Emperor was delighted and personally wrote the word "Virtuous" to give to Prince Han. The hundreds of officials praised him and the Crown Prince grew even more jealous.

As for Sheng Chumu, he was brilliant in using his army and obtained much military success. He even charged in and out three times to rescue Prince Han. When all these were reported to the Emperor, the Emperor forbade him from returning to the borders. Sheng Chumu was to remain in Chang'an. He was bestowed the new title of General Xuanwu and tasked to guard Xuanwu gate.

During that morning's court, the Emperor generously gave out gifts and even praised the Crown Prince for recommending Prince Han.

The Crown Prince still felt down. Nothing that he had planned had been successful. Prince Han's reputation became more celebrated and they did not manage to find the letter that he wrote to Prince Zhao. He was afraid that it had landed in someone else's hands. He had calculated and planned everything but was left with nothing in return.

Meanwhile, Prince Zhou had also been praised but on this rare

occasion, he was feeling the same feelings as the Crown Prince. He was upset. He had recommended Sheng Chumu because he trusted Fu Rou and because he could not go by himself. However, he was slightly dissatisfied with Prince Han and Sheng Chumu. Prince Zhao, the person that had killed Qian Wenjing brutally, was still alive.

What made it harder for Prince Zhou to accept was that Prince Zhao had only been locked for two days. From what he heard from his mother, Prince Zhao had pleaded for mercy pitifully. Moreover, the Empress pleaded on his behalf and the Emperor had forgiven Prince Zhao. Prince Zhao was then stripped of his title and reduced to a commoner and the whole incident was dropped. He could not stand this. He made up his mind to fight against this decision and knelt in the path that the Emperor had to take.

“In the path of learning, the most difficult thing is to respect the teacher. Upon receiving respect, teachers have to impart knowledge to students before students can be respected. Only when students receive knowledge can they then be respected by others. During ceremonies, even the teacher does not have an inferior position to the son of heaven!” He wrapped a white band around his head and had a sorrowful expression.

The Emperor sighed, “I understand that you cannot let go of Qian Wenjing’s death.”

“Prince Zhao killed Qian Wenjing so cruelly that even people criticised him. Imperial Father, you promised me that you would seek justice for Qian Wenjing. Have you forgotten your promise?”

“I did not forget.” *However, Prince Zhao was his own flesh and blood. How could he kill his own son!*

“Then I plead Imperial Father to act according to the nation’s law and console the spirit of a faithful official.” *Prince Zhao could not be forgiven.*

“You are my son. Can’t you understand my love for my children? Prince Zhao is your brother. Can’t you pity him in the slightest?”

“Rebels and traitors. What is there to forgive?” He had never

interacted much with Prince Zhao, much less form any brotherly bond. “How many innocent people have died because of Prince Zhao’s rebellion? If Imperial Father sympathises with Prince Zhao and does not correct him, how can you face the numerous officials and soldiers that did their best for the country?”

The Emperor was unhappy. “That is enough!”

“Imperial Father, you cannot ignore the national laws just because of a woman from the harem!” *It wasn’t enough!*

The Emperor slapped Prince Zhou. “Impudent! Lige, I have been too lenient on you! If you dare to continue speaking, you will be severely punished!” He then swiped his sleeve and left.

Prince Zhou kneeled for a while before standing up. When he turned around, he saw Fu Rou in the distance. He did not know how much she had seen. He thought that she would turn and leave but instead, she walked towards him. He then recalled. *She could cry for a palace maid that she did not know, of course she would pity him.*

“I was wrong.” He gazed up at the blue sky, letting go of all the pent up frustrations in his heart. “I should not have brought you back from Guangzhou. The Royal Palace is not a place for good people to stay. In here, there is no use being upright or loyal. No matter how much one wants to be a good person, in the end, they have no choice but to become bad. To helplessly fall.” *Why did he think that kneeling and begging would have worked?*

“Your Highness, your thinking is too extreme. The Royal Palace is the backbone of Great Tang. Here, everything that happens will concern the entire country. If even upright and loyal people don’t have a place here, what is Great Tang left with?” *She was unwilling to be so negative.*

He laughed bitterly, “Alas, only the person I like persists on being herself and is not willing to be changed by the world.”

Unfortunately, he could not do it. His Imperial Father only knew how to say that he loved him but has never ever given him anything he wanted. Luckily, his mother would always be on his side and would try to be

considerate of him. He would do anything to make Prince Zhao pay the price.

In prison, Prince Zhao was eating and drinking well. Empress Zhangsun had sent someone to inform him that the Emperor was intending to forgive him. After hearing this, Prince Zhao's appetite grew.

All of a sudden, an internal attendant appeared outside the bars. He claimed that he was an attendant from the Eastern Palace. The attendant proceeded to tell him that the Crown Prince could not bear to see Prince Zhao be killed and came to inform him beforehand. Prince Zhao was shocked. He thought that the Emperor had forgiven him.

The attendant said, "Your Highness is too gullible. Even if His Majesty wants to let you live, there are other people who will not let you. The person who swore to take your life is in the Royal Palace. Do you still remember the student that Qian Wenjing was most proud of?"

"Prince Zhou?"

"As long as Your Highness is imprisoned here, your life will be at risk. Your only option is to escape from here as soon as possible."

"Here...how can I escape?" Prince Zhao wavered.

"The Crown Prince cannot bear to see you lose your life. However, as this matter must be hidden, we cannot use anyone from the Eastern Palace. Your Highness, do you still have anyone you trust in Chang'an?"

Prince Zhao's eyes spun. "Yes yes! There are still a few soldiers hidden in Chang'an. I gave them a new lease of life so they have sworn their lives to me!"

"That's great! Your Highness, you just have to write down their names and locations and I will help you pass on the message. Soon you will be able to connect with the outside world. Your Highness

doesn't have to worry about being imprisoned.”

Prince Zhao did not hesitate as he wrote down everything. He even personally wrote a letter to hand over to the attendant.

The attendant took a look at the dishes. “Please take care of yourself, Your Highness. Don’t consume dishes given to you by strangers.”

After the attendant left, Prince Zhao was fidgety as he walked in front of the table. He kicked the table leg, causing the dishes to fall to the ground. He was foolish. He did not know that actually there was nothing wrong with the food. He was the one that sent himself on the road of no return.

When Empress Zhangsun heard that the Emperor urgently summoned the Crown Prince, she rushed to Ganlou Palace. The Imperial Guards had found the letter that Prince Zhao wrote. When they handed it over to the Emperor, the Emperor was furious.

Because she had walked too fast, Empress Zhangsun was coughing breathlessly and was slightly unsteady. Fu Rou rushed to support her. “Your Majesty, your health is more important.”

Empress Zhangsun coughed, “I don’t understand. What exactly did Prince Zhao write that made the Emperor summon the Crown Prince immediately? What has it got to do with the Crown Prince? And Prince Zhao, I already told him that the Emperor intends to pardon him. Can’t he just wait patiently?”

Fu Rou remained silent as she held her. She disliked conspiracies and pretending that everything was alright. She only looked at the truth. Under a circumstance like this where she did not know much, she preferred to remain silent.

When they entered Ganlou Palace, Fu Rou realised that Prince Zhou and Prince Han were both around. They were listening to the Emperor’s rage.

“On account of our father son relationship, I did not want to punish him by death. I never expected him to plot scheme after scheme. He

has no intention of repenting. I was too careless and did not think that he could dispatch death soldiers that are willing to die for him as his last attempt! It is written here that he wants to break out of prison and escape from Chang'an to achieve big things...are the big things he is referring to, rebellion? Is he trying to force me to the corner? He is the one that cut off the last thread of relationship that we had! Men!"

Court Lady

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An internal attendant rushed up.

“Heed my decree. Prince Zhao Liyou has committed a grave sin. He has been imprisoned yet he attempted to send out a secret message to rebel against his father. The truth is out and he cannot be pardoned. He shall be given poison.”

The internal attendant bowed. Empress Zhangsun was shocked. “Your Majesty...”

The Emperor waved his hand. “Empress, you do not need to try to convince me. I have already given Prince Zhao a chance.” He turned and stared at the Crown Prince. “In Prince Zhao’s letter, he asked the death soldiers to listen to the Crown Prince’s command in order to help him connect to the outside world and escape prison. Crown Prince, it seems like your relationship with Prince Zhao is pretty deep.”

Empress Zhangsun’s eyes froze over. The Crown Prince kneeled in fright. “I do not know anything about this.”

The Emperor snorted, “You don’t know anything yet Prince Zhao placed his last hope on you?”

“I have been framed.”

“He is using his own life to frame you?” The Emperor almost blurted out that it was a similar case with Hong Yide. *Were they all giving up their lives to frame the Crown Prince? However, he stopped himself just as the words were about to leave him. After all, he was the one that said that Hong Yide’s case had been concluded.*

Empress Zhangsun threw Prince Han a look.

Prince Han summoned his courage and spoke up, “Imperial Father, there may be an explanation as to why Prince Zhao would use his life to frame the Crown Prince. Prince Zhao never thought that Imperial Father would forgive him after he committed such a big crime. When he was captured back to Chang’an, he must have believed that he was doomed. Since he knew that he would not be able to survive, he chose to bring someone down with him. Therefore, he intentionally wrote a secret letter and made it such that it would be picked up by an Imperial Guard. Then he could have a quick death and have another scapegoat.”

The Emperor was not convinced. “Even if he wanted to bring someone down, he should have chosen you. After all, you were the one that captured him back alive.”

“Precisely because I was the one that captured him, so Imperial Father may not fall for it if he conspires against me. But if he got to the heart of the matter, the Crown Prince was the one that recommended me. Hence, the Crown Prince must be the one that Prince Zhao hates.”

The Emperor narrowed his eyes. “Is that all?”

Prince Han cried internally. *He could not think of anything else at the moment.*

Fu Rou stepped forward. “Your Majesty, I think that if Prince Han had been set up, the end result would be hurting a prince. However, if the Crown Prince was the one that was set up, it would shake the entire nation.” *She felt that there was something suspicious about this matter.*

Prince Zhou, who had initially left himself out of the matter, looked

at her.

The Emperor seemed to be thinking it through. “Shaking the nation?”

Prince Han immediately put in effort. “That’s right. Imperial Father, how can the Crown Prince collude with Prince Zhao?”

Empress Zhangsun felt like it was time to remind him. “That’s right, Your Majesty. Don’t forget what Grand Emperor said before he passed on.”

The Emperor’s expression slowly warmed up. *Back then, he did not selectively listen to Hong Yide. Now, he naturally could not just listen to Prince Zhao. They were all people that wanted to bring harm to Great Tang.*

“Crown Prince, you may rise. I believe that you would not conduct such enraging acts.”

“Imperial Father is wise.” The Crown Prince thanked and got up.

Soon, the internal attendant returned to report. In the rectangle tray that he held, the wine cup was empty. This meant that Prince Zhao had died.

“Empress.” The Emperor suddenly called. Empress Zhangsun’s heart skipped a beat. “Your Majesty.”

The Emperor spoke, “You are the head of the six palaces. I want to ask you how you are intending to deal with Concubine Xi.”

Empress Zhangsun lowered her eyes. “Concubine Xi is no longer worthy of holding her position as concubine. She should...” *Although Prince Zhao had rebelled, Concubine Xi had also been implicated but there was no need for her to die.* “Be demoted to just a lady.”

The Emperor was unsatisfied. “For raising such an evil and scheming son, how can she have the face to continue living as his mother? You spoke to me numerous times about tidying up and adhering strictly to the palace rules. Is this what you mean by tidying up? To allow the mother of a rebel to enjoy the contributions of Great Tang’s citizens?”

Empress Zhangsun could not rebut. "I am incapable and did not handle this appropriately. I will follow Your Majesty's judgement."

The Emperor spoke coldly, "Heed my decree. Concubine Xi raised a rebel. She is at fault for not teaching her son well. She shall be given a white silk (Meaning to hang herself)."

Empress Zhangsun opened her mouth once again but ended up not saying anything. As the internal attendant was about to leave to carry out the Imperial Decree, Fu Rou stepped out once again and said, "Wait. Your Majesty, have you heard this saying?"

"Speak." The Emperor was extremely unhappy but he wanted to know what she wanted to say.

"An uneducated child is a father's fault."

The Emperor's face fell. "Are you trying to say that Prince Zhao's rebellion is my fault?"

"I would not dare. However, as a father, you didn't know about Prince Zhao's rebellion. How would Concubine Xi, who stays in the harem and has difficulty even talking to her son, be at fault? So much as to be punishable by death?"

The Emperor was furious. "Good! Very good! I have been too generous and kind these past few years. Even a court lady dares to point out my faults!"

Empress Zhangsun coaxed, "Please calm down, Your Majesty."

"Empress, the people that you instruct are certainly different. Do you also want to point out and scold me for being a father that does not know how to teach my children?" The Emperor was furious.

Empress Zhangsun kneeled down. "Your Majesty!"

Upon seeing their mother kneel, the Crown Prince and Prince Han kneeled quickly. The Crown Prince said, "Imperial Father, Imperial Mother definitely has no intentions of criticising you. Imperial Mother has managed the harem for so many years and has been generous and kind to the various concubines. Moreover, Concubine

Xi has always been respectful. Imperial Mother just could not bear to see her be punished.” *His Imperial Mother could not fall!*

Prince Han added, “Fu Siyan has a straight, direct and slightly impetuous personality. Imperial Father is a wise ruler and looks upon numerous citizens. You don’t have to be concerned with the careless words said by an ignorant court lady.” *Even if he clashed with Chumu, he had to protect Fu Rou.*

“Even a court lady dares to speak so brazenly in front of me.” The Emperor turned to glare at Fu Rou. “Who gave you such courage?”

Prince Zhou finally kneeled down. He was calm as he replied on her behalf, “Her courage was given by you, Imperial Father.”

The Emperor was stunned. “What did you say?”

Prince Zhou spoke at an unhurried pace, “When the Imperial Grandson was born, Imperial father wanted to reward Fu Siyan for saving the Crown Princess and the Imperial Grandson from the difficult pregnancy. During the banquet, Imperial Father said that since she was a Siyan, you would grant her the permission of speech. From that time onwards, Fu Siyan was allowed to speak in front of Imperial Father. As the son of heaven, your words are law.”

“That’s right, Imperial Father, you should forgive Fu Siyan.” Prince Han backed Prince Zhou. As he spoke, he turned his head to look up at Fu Rou who was still standing upright. He hurriedly tugged hard on her sleeve.

Fu Rou kneeled but kept her back straight. She spoke respectfully, “In the first three years of the early Tang Dynasty, Li Daliang admonished the Emperor and spoke about his good and bad points. Not only did the Emperor not get angry, he was actually happy and praised him for being blunt and revealing exactly what he was thinking. The Emperor even encouraged him to continue being earnest and stay honest to the end. Many people said that the Emperor was one of the best rulers as he was able to accept admonishment and he was one of the most generous rulers since ancient times. Although my rank is low, I love my country. Regardless of gender or seniority, I am a citizen of Great Tang and

should be loyal to my country and hence I have to speak frankly.”

She took a deep breath before continuing, “When Prince Zhao rebelled, not only did he betray his father, he also betrayed his mother. For parents to have such a child, they will feel pain and anger. If Your Majesty feels this, Concubine Xi must feel the same. Prince Zhao has already been executed. Will Your Majesty’s heartache be resolved if you kill Concubine Xi too? Wouldn’t it just be a greater heartache? After all, Concubine Xi has served Your Majesty for many years. If Your Majesty orders her to be killed in a moment of anger, would you really not regret it in the future? I hope that Your Majesty can think twice.”

Prince Han muttered, “Amitabha, please stop talking...”

Fu Rou’s expression did not change. “I have finished what I wanted to say. If Your Majesty thinks what I said was nonsensical and worthless, then please grant me death.” Now, she submitted to him.

The Emperor sat down and looked at her in silence for a moment. He suddenly said, “Prince Zhou, you have a good eye. What a pity that her fate is set and she cannot serve anyone of the Royal family. She can only remain as a court lady.”

The Emperor stood and walked out. As he walked past Empress Zhangsun, he paused. “Let Concubine Xi be demoted to a lady.”

A weight lifted off Empress Zhangsun. “Thank you for your benevolence, Your Majesty.”

Omg... Fu Rou has so much guts. Life in the palace is not easy...

Court Lady

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Fu Rou accompanied Empress Zhangsun back to Lizheng Palace. As she walked out of the palace, she was stopped by Prince Zhou who had been waiting for her. He dragged her to Lingxiao Palace.

“How can the parents be forgiven if their child is not taught well?” Prince Zhou pushed her down onto a swing and held the two ropes by her side.

“I spoke the truth.” Her body shivered along with the swaying of the swing but her eyes were icy cold.

“Even if Sheng Chumu turns a blind eye to you and you are depressed because of it, there is no reason for you to give your life away!” Prince Zhou roared. *Did she think he would not be able to see what she was planning?*

Fu Rou was instantly dumbfounded. *Was that why Prince Zhou was reprimanding her? No, not at all! When she thought Sheng Chumu died, her heart had been broken into a million pieces. However, now she was only being ignored by him. She was not shortsighted and would not disregard her life just because she was heartbroken.*

Prince Zhou reached his hand out and was about to touch Fu Rou's face but she turned away. Prince Zhou sighed, “Forget it, I should not have mentioned Sheng Chumu.”

Fu Rou said, "Thank you for your concern."

"Your tone makes it sound like you are not grateful for me." His heart clenched.

"I was sincere with my words but if you do not take it in the right way, I cannot do anything about it." *She did not ask for his help anyway.*

Prince Zhou's gaze fell on Fu Rou for a while before he gently pulled back and released the swing.

"Why did you have to risk infuriating Imperial Father to speak for Concubine Xi? What relationship do you have with Concubine Xi?" She had foiled his plans but in that moment, he had only been worried for her life.

"When things are not in favor, some will run away. It was not in accordance to Great Tang's laws if His Majesty punished a subordinate too severely out of his rage. Someone had to hold him back." She could not be at ease if she did not speak her mind.

"Do not be so rash in the future. Imperial Father may not forgive you the next time. If you anger the dragon, you will die." While it was a lucky thing that Fu Rou escaped unscathed this time, it would be hard for even the gods to save her the next time. Even the most brilliant person could die with a single wrong sentence. Words were gold but were also dangerous.

"Thank you for your advice, Your Highness. I will take my leave first." Fu Rou stood up to leave.

Prince Zhou said, "I did it on purpose." Fu Rou stopped in her tracks, waiting for Prince Zhou to continue.

"I know that I should not have mentioned Sheng Chumu but I purposely did it to see your reaction. If you showed anger upon hearing his name, it would be a good thing for me. At least, I would know that you hated him. If you cried, it would also be a good thing because it would give me the opportunity to comfort you. But you were silent and showed no response. The more you remain silent, the

more it confirms to me that you have not let him go.”

“As Your Highness has said, I am indeed a person who does not know how to let go. This is my personality, who can change that?” Fu Rou continued to walk, and left the garden of Lingxiao Palace. Only after she walked to an empty corridor did she sigh and lean against the wall.

Chumu had returned and she had been happy at the thought of finally meeting him again. She wanted to explain what happened at Guangzhou but who knew that he would ignore her after the court session. At that moment, she felt that he had already let go of her hand and left her.

In the past few days, she had not been able to eat or sleep well. She felt her heart being torn apart. Today, she witnessed the Emperor’s indifference and the power struggle between the Empress and the princes. She did not understand why the Imperial family had to kill each other even though they were not a normal family. *Was it that hard to love and care for each other? Even the Empress, a wife, had to be cautious all the time and kneel down to beg for forgiveness.*

Sheng Chumu’s coldness and the Imperial family’s power struggle made her boil with anger. Out of boldness, she had spoken up, unafraid of death. She did not want to live such a life of oppression.

Her tears rolled down her face silently and the pain in her heart spread through her entire body like tiny knives. However, as long as she lived, she would not remain in the same spot.

She supported herself with the wall and slowly walked forward. As long as she does not change, she would persevere regardless of the difficulties.

Supporting her big belly, Fu Yin ambled towards Lu Qi’s room. She had been thinking a lot during the time that Lu Qi was on his military deployment. Lu Yingying’s words about moving forward were etched deeply into her mind.

She had been at a loss until something happened recently. Mo Li had accidentally frightened her, causing her to break the bracelet that Lu Hanxing's mother had given her. She was so mad she vented her anger by beating Mo Li. When she finally calmed down and saw Mo Li's frightened expression, she recalled the time when she was bullied by Ling Long before finally regaining her senses.

Fu Yin definitely did not want to become like Ling Long or Lu Hanxing or anyone who was evil. Her own mother had a foul tongue but never did anything truly evil. Although her mother was very calculative, she had taken money out of her own pocket when the family was in financial need. *If she turned evil for the sake of revenge, her mother would never forgive her in the afterlife.*

As such, before Lu Qi left for battle, Fu Yin prayed to her mother and swore that she would abandon her revenge if he returned safe. Now that Lu Qi had returned safely, she no longer doubted herself and poured her heart to wholeheartedly love him. Lu Qi was a simple man and did not find anything strange with her sudden change. Instead, he treated her even better than before.

This day, Fu Yin walked towards the hall and found many servants standing on the steps outside the study room. Puzzled, Fu Yin walked towards Mo Li and asked her what was going on.

“Sister Yin’er, I was just about to inform you. Young Master instructed Housekeeper Wu to gather all servants who entered the study room here.” Although she had been beaten by Fu Yin, Fu Yin had apologised to her after and Mo Li did not bear a grudge. She continued, “But I do not know what is going on.”

At that point, Lu Qi walked forward with a stern expression. “On June 2nd, a letter went missing from my room. Whoever stole it, admit your mistake now.”

That letter had been given to him by a spy he had sent to General Zhenhai's residence. The reason why he was reinvestigating this old matter was because the spy had been discovered by Yan Zifang. However, the spy managed to escape to the Lu Residence. There, he informed Lu Qi about the letter. This was how Lu Qi discovered a spy in his own residence.

Lu Qi continued, "Everyone who is allowed to enter my study room has been gathered here. None of you will be able to handle being tortured. Therefore, own up to your mistake honestly and avoid being tortured."

No one spoke but Fu Yin nervously trembled by the side.

"Not speaking?" Lu Qi's gaze turned cold. He ordered, "Lock everyone up and interrogate them. Don't blame me if you lose your life!"

Fu Yin observed the fearful expressions in all the servants' eyes and she did not want to implicate the innocent. She was just about to admit her wrongdoings when Mo Li rushed forward and kneeled down.

Mo Li cried, "It...it is me..."

Fu Yin was shocked. *How could it be Mo Li? She was clearly the one who burned the letter!*

Mo Li's voice trembled as she confessed, "I accidentally knocked over a cup of tea on the table when I was cleaning the room that day. The tea spilled over one letter and as I was afraid of being scolded, I brought the letter out to dry it. Unfortunately, the ink on the letter was smudged horribly. I was afraid that Young Master would punish me and I threw the letter away."

Lu Qi's eyes narrowed and cursed, "Damn servant. How can I be sure that what you said is true? Did someone order you to destroy the letter?" He ordered Housekeeper Wu to drag Mo Li down to interrogate her.

Housekeeper Wu and a few other servants stepped forward to drag Mo Li away. Fu Yin recalled Ling Long's tragic death and she hurried forward to stop them.

"No, don't touch her, this is not her fault!" *She had burnt the letter and she could not drag any innocent person into the matter.*

Lu Qi instructed, "Take her away."

Fu Yin struggled against the servants for a while but suddenly felt a sharp pain from her abdomen. Mo Li screamed, “Sister Yin’er... blood... blood!”

Fu Yin lowered her gaze and saw a pool of blood below her.

“Yin’er!” Lu Qi rushed towards her in panic. Fu Yin’s complexion was pale and her face was drenched in sweat but she refused to accept the hand Lu Qi extended to help her. “No...don’t punish Mo Li...” Pangs of pain shot from her abdomen, causing her to scream.

Lu Qi was worried to death and he hollered, “What is happening now? Why are you still talking about that!”

“Forgive Mo Li...” *She did not want to use one life to exchange for another.*

“Alright, alright, I promise.” Lu Qi stared at the pool of blood on the floor that seemed to continue growing as fear gripped his heart. He begged, “Yin’er, let me carry you back to the room, alright?”

“Swear. Swear on our love. If you break this vow, we will break apart and I will never meet you again.” Fu Yin gasped through her panted breath. Her vision was slowly turning dark.

“Yes! I will swear on our love!” He was willing to sacrifice everything for her.

Fu Yin smiled weakly before losing her strength and fell into his arms.

“Call the physician!” Lu Qi shouted.

“Call...call the midwife...” With an arm around Lu Qi’s neck, Fu Yin weakly whispered, “I think I am about to give birth...”

“What?!” With panic gripping him, Lu Qi was at a loss of what to do. His steps started becoming smaller and he stammered, “What...no... aiya, hurry, hurry, call the midwife!”

Fu Yin hugged Lu Qi tightly and heard the strong beats of his heart as she rested her head on his chest. She was immediately at ease. Once

the child was born, she was willing to spend her life with him.

Can Fu Yin really let go of her hatred?

Court Lady

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The sun rays of the setting sun shone on the building and night was approaching. The military flag spread its corners and fluttered in the wind. Sheng Chumu stood alone at the stand and looked far into the distance. He had undergone a huge change; his appearance was cold and hard, as though he had been carved out using a knife. His skin was burnt by the blazing sun and it seemed to shine with cold rays. His deep eyes carried a mysterious feeling.

“That is the direction of Guangzhou City.” Du Ning remarked, “Your mother has met up with mine and my mother has been pushing me to persuade you to at least pick one.”

“Good things should not be enjoyed alone. You pick first and I will take the rest.” Sheng Chumu turned to look at his good friend.

His worried mother was afraid that he would have to go to the borders again and had been trying to set him up on a blind date recently. She brought all the portraits of Chang'an's rich girls. However, his heart constantly had one person in it. He thought that he would be able to get rid of his feelings after staying at the border for a period of time. However, when he returned to the court that day, his feelings came rushing back in a flood when he caught a glimpse of her. He desperately wanted to rush to her and ask her whether she had him in her heart. The trip to the border was wasted.

Du Ning did not laugh at Sheng Chumu's words. Ever since Fu Yin disappeared, he had not laughed ever again.

Sheng Chumu knew Du Ning's feelings but remained professional and asked, "Have you met Fu Tao?"

Du Ning answered, "Yes, I did. He praised your observation skills in the siege at Prince Zhao's residence. Lu Qi had ordered him to head to Prince Zhao's study room to retrieve the letter that the Crown Prince had given Prince Zhao. He found it but did not know the use of it. However, he did not want to pass it to Lu Qi and lied that he did not find the letter." Du Ning took a letter from his pouch and said, "He told me to pass this to you."

"He does not know that I have already..." Sheng Chumu could not even bear to say Fu Rou's name. "We are no longer together."

"You and the Fu family have the same enemy. At least you are in a better position than me, no one in the Fu family knows of my existence even after I lost Fu Yin." Du Ning grabbed a silver flask attached to his waist and drank two mouths from it.

There was wine inside the flask. He did not know when he started having the habit of bringing wine around with him. Every time he thought of Fu Yin, he would drink to ease the pain in his heart.

"Stop drinking." Sheng Chumu pushed the flask away from him and said, "Otherwise, before Fu Yin returns, your body will break down."

"I will not drink after this." Seeing Sheng Chumu's suspicious stare, Du Ning smiled bitterly and reassured, "I am serious. After this bottle, I will not drink anymore because I found her."

"Where is she?" Sheng Chumu could instantly tell that Du Ning was unhappy.

"Fu Tao has met with Fu Yin and he told me that she is in a very safe place. Once she clears things on her side, she will return. But he refused to tell me where she is." *It was strange.* Although he knew Fu Yin was safe, he also knew that he had missed his opportunity to be with her this lifetime.

Sheng Chumu exclaimed, "When did that lad start to mature? What does Fu Yin have on her mind that she needs this time? Why didn't you ask Fu Tao for more information if you had been searching for Fu Yin for so long?"

Du Ning shook his head. "I wanted to press him further but I could not bring myself to ask. When Fu Yin left, I kept asking myself why she wanted to leave. Fu Yin is timid and if it weren't for a big issue, she would not leave. When she left, she had already decided that she would not marry me. No matter what I do, the outcome will be the same."

Sheng Chumu asked, "You can stop trying to find her. However, will you be able to stop thinking about her?"

"I can't do that but there is also nothing I can do. The choice was hers." Du Ning hesitated, "But you can still do something, you can talk to her. My situation is different. After so long, there is no way to change the outcome."

Sheng Chumu turned to face the night sky. "I am inferior to you. I do not have the courage to face the outcome."

Du Ning gulped down the rest of the wine and threw the flask aside. "I have finished the last bit of the wine." He patted Sheng Chumu's shoulder and left.

Sheng Chumu gazed at the stars in the sky silently. As he observed the stars glittering in the sky, he wondered if he could see the constellation lyra. After some time, a sweet fragrance filled the air and someone walked towards him. It was Lian Yan'er.

"I met Official Lu coincidentally and he told me that you were here." Lian Yan'er stared at Sheng Chumu's side profile and said, "I can not stay at General Zhenhai's residence anymore."

"Why?" Prince Han visited Belle Shop everyday and his sister had been nagging at him that he missed a good lady like Ma Hainiu. That was how Sheng Chumu knew that the two were the owners of Belle Shop. "I heard that the two of you have become entangled."

Lian Yan'er sighed, "Ma Haihu wants to marry me."

"And you are not willing to marry him?" Sheng Chumu had once been in the same field as Lian Yan'er and knew that although she had a poor origin, she was beautiful and had many talents. A woman like her would soar high.

Lian Yan'er stared at him and murmured, "All this time, you are the person who understands me the most."

Sheng Chumu did not deny it. "Is there anywhere you can go?"

Lian Yan'er shook her head and Sheng Chumu suddenly turned around and left. Lian Yan'er was disappointed that he left but suddenly, Sheng Chumu stopped.

"What are you standing there for?" Sheng Chumu turned to face her. *If he brought her home, at least he could appease his mother for a while.*

Lian Yan'er was stunned but she broke into a smile and ran towards him.

Sun Residence.

Sun Lingwei blew the candle out but could not sleep. She leaned against her window and stared at the stars, enjoying the time she had to herself.

Because her sister was the Crown Princess, her father also had high expectations for her. In the past, she would have to learn whatever her sister learned. Poetry, singing, playing instruments and drawing were among things she had to learn even though she may not have liked those activities. She was not as pretty nor as smart as her sister and she would be exhausted after each lesson. However, she was very filial and she would listen to her parents to please them. She would not complain.

The stars glittered and the image of a handsome face appeared in her mind. This man's face was brighter than any star in the sky. Somehow, everything he said could make her laugh. He was that

incredible. The two peace knots that he had given her allowed her and her sister to make up and also helped her sister and the Crown Prince to get along better.

Sun Lingwei was lost in her thoughts. In her mind, the stars seemed to project Sheng Chujun's face. She said, "If I could see you everyday, that would be great."

"Oh, are you proposing to me?" Sheng Chujun jumped in from the window. With bright eyes, he said, "I agree. You better not regret this."

Sun Lingwei jumped in shock and stammered, "Are you real?"

"Of course!" Sheng Chujun took her small hands. "Touch me if you do not believe."

Sun Lingwei's face reddened and she withdrew her hand. "What... what are you here for?"

"Must I have a reason to come?" Sheng Chujun was not feeling well today. His mother had brought a large number of women portraits for his brother today. Among them was Sun Lingwei's. He wanted to hide her portrait secretly but was caught and punished by his mother who scolded him for wanting to steal his brother's potential wife.

Therefore, out of anger, Sheng Chujun sneaked into the Sun Residence. *Sun Lingwei would never be his sister-in-law because she was the one he liked and the one he would marry!*

"This is my room." Sun Lingwei did not know what he was thinking.

Annoyed, Sheng Chujun asked, "Must I wait till you marry to find you in your husband's room? I am a proper man and I will not have eyes for a married woman. If I have to find a woman, I would go to an unmarried woman's room."

Sun Lingwei could tell that he was not happy. "What is wrong with you today? You are so fierce."

"I..." Sheng Chujun's gaze sharpened but his heart softened when he saw Sun Lingwei's innocent eyes. "Forget it, it is not your fault."

Sun Lingwei raised her hand and patted his back softly. "If you are not happy, I will pat your back to comfort you.

Touched, Sheng Chujun said, "Lingwei, marry me."

Sun Lingwei immediately withdrew her hand. "I cannot decide matters of my marriage and will abide by my parents' decision." She glanced at him shyly. "But you don't need to be too discouraged. You can talk to your parents and propose an engagement to me. After that, we can go through the official matters, seek a fortune teller, calculate our fates, decide on a date for marriage. Then we can be husband and wife."

"Will your father agree to you marrying a rich playboy?" His family was more easygoing and would be glad if there was any woman he could marry. However, Sun Lingwei's parents had high expectations.

Sun Lingwei's expression hardened slightly. "No way. My father said that rich playboys destroyed their own reputations. If I get close to them, I may also lose my innocence. My mother also said that since my sister married to the Crown Prince, she would become the mother of Great Tang in the future. As the younger sister of the mother of Great Tang, I have to marry well. I have to marry someone who is capable, has a good personality and reputation."

Sheng Chujun's head hurt. *This was what he expected.*

Sun Lingwei continued, "Otherwise, the person I marry would embarrass the Crown Prince, Crown Princess and the Sun family. My mother also said..."

Sheng Chujun cut her off. "Lingwei, I want to marry you but you have to give me some time."

Sun Lingwei was confused. "What are you planning to do?"

Sheng Chujun was sincere. "You probably have no idea, but a person so incredible and brilliant like me is envied by many people who are out to tarnish my reputation. I did not bother about them in the past but it is different now. I have to rebuild my reputation and get rid of that rich playboy image I have before I can propose an engagement

to your family properly. Are you willing to wait for me till then?"

Sun Lingwei nodded heavily. "I am willing to."

"What would you do if your father asks you to marry another person as you wait for me?" *There had to be precautions.*

"Then I will listen to father." Sun Lingwei was completely serious. "Obey the parents, obey the husband and listen to the children. Before I marry, I will listen to whatever father says. Once we are married and you are my husband, I will listen to whatever you say. If you pass on earlier than me, I will listen to whatever our son has to say."

"Aiyo..." Sheng Chujun wanted to smack himself and did not know whether to cry or laugh. He has found his little treasure. "I have really given into you..."

Sun Lingwei beamed. "You have given into me? That must mean that I have learned the principles of marriage well." She placed her palms together and turned towards the sky, "Amitofo, I have not wasted my mother's efforts of teaching me."

Sheng Chujun jumped forward and hugged Sun Lingwei. *She is the best. She has completely won my heart!*

I feel bad for Du Ning. Sigh.

And awww Chujun is also so good at flirting! All the Sheng bros are shameless. Haha.

Court Lady

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Fu Yin had given birth to a son. Although the labor had been difficult, she was alright. Now, she was Lu Qi's concubine. Everyone was addressing her as "Lady". She was happy for a period of time, taking care of her child and receiving Lu Qi's love. Her heart was full and satisfied.

On this day, Fu Yin realised that Mo Li was missing. In the morning, when she woke up, she did not see Mo Li come to serve her. Fu Yin then asked the other servants and they all said that they did not know the reason why. Her first reaction was that Lu Qi had lied to her and gotten rid of Mo Li.

Fu Yin barged into the study room, angrily criticising Lu Qi and asking where Mo Li was.

Lu Qi did not think anything was strange as he walked up to Fu Yin and helped her put on an outer coat. He then asked. "You just gave birth and should be lying in bed. Did you come to the study room just to ask about a servant?"

Fu Yin threw the outer coat onto the ground. "Where exactly is Mo Li?"

Lu Qi frowned. "She is gone. After all, she made a mistake and ruined an important letter of mine. She is so clumsy, I cannot let her stay and serve in the study room. Just now, her uncle came to see her and

told her that her father was sick. Hence, I decided to be nice and let her go.”

“You promised me that you would not hurt her.” Fu Yin did not believe him. *How can there be such a coincidence?*

“You don’t believe me?” Lu Qi got angry as well.

“I don’t believe you.” Fu Yin’s eyes became red. “You killed her. Just like how you killed Ling Long.”

“Yin’er, listen to me...” Lu Qi still tried his best to suppress his anger and explain to her.

Fu Yin covered her ears. “I don’t want to listen! I am a fool. I always thought that you would change and can one day let go of your hatred and everything will be well. No! It is not possible! You are a killer. Since the first day I met you, you are a cruel and heartless murderer!”

“Don’t think that just because you helped me give birth to a son, you can act so unrestrained in front of me! Go to your room now!” Lu Qi was slightly confused as he listened to her. But he could clearly hear the disgust in Fu Yin’s voice.

“Son?” Fu Yin had been suppressing her feelings for so long and she finally exploded. “I should not have helped you give birth to a son. How can I help a murderer give birth? When I was pregnant with him, I should not have kept him!”

Lu Qi was shocked and anger boiled within him. He raised his hand. However, he then lowered his hand, grabbed Fu Yin’s hand instead and led her out of the residence. He got on a horse with Fu Yin and started galloping.

An hour after they left the city, Fu Yin saw an old carriage in front of them. The curtains were open and Mo Li’s face could be seen.

Mo Li hopped out of the carriage happily. “Sister Yin’er! Are you here to send me off?”

Fu Yin mumbled, “Mo Li, you are still alive...”

"I am sorry, Sister Yin'er. I can no longer serve you. My father has fallen ill and I have to follow my uncle back home. Young Master said that you gave birth to a son and everyone in the residence was to be rewarded. I was given some money and that saved me from selling my valuables. When I was leaving, you were still sleeping..."

Fu Yin wiped her tears and felt sad for herself. Mo Li was stunned. "Sister Yin'er, are you okay?"

Fu Yin forced a smile. "I am happy to see that you are well."

The both of them spoke for a while before Fu Yin sent Mo Li off. She walked slowly back to Lu Qi. She knew that she was in the wrong. However, half of the things that she had blurted out in anger was the truth that she had buried in her heart. She did not know what she should say to mend the crack that had formed between them.

"Cruel and heartless murderer?" Lu Qi looked coldly at her. "Should not have been the mother of my child?" It was the first time he realised that he did not know her at all.

Fu Yin bit her lip.

"I am going to ask you one last question. I hope you can answer me truthfully." He wished for her to coax him, even if it was full of loopholes. "When you were pregnant with our child, did you ever think of getting rid of him?"

Fu Yin fell silent for a long while before finally nodding. However, as she saw Lu Qi's expression turn stoic and scary, she could not help but reach out. She wanted to touch his face and express how apologetic she was.

Without waiting for Fu Yin to touch him, Lu Qi turned and walked away. She stared at his back in a daze, with tears running down her face. In the end, she had gotten what she deserved for the demons in her heart.

Something happened to the Crown Prince as he was hunting in the mountains behind Han Mansion!

The Crown Prince was the one that initiated the hunt this time in order to show the Empress that the relationship between him and Prince Han was still good. However, when the time came to hunt, he silently stifled his interest. As he thought of how grand Prince Han was, he decided that he had to outperform him in terms of archery no matter what. Hence, when the hunt started, he rushed off on his horse, leaving all his guards behind as he entered the forest alone. In the end, he went missing.

Sheng Chumu was the first to find the Crown Prince's mount and immediately called for a search. They finally found him at the bottom of a precipitous slope. At that time, the Crown Prince was already unconscious and there was a stranger attempting to help him stop bleeding. This was a huge matter and Sheng Chumu could not let the man go. He brought the man back with them.

When Prince Han saw this man, he was extremely shocked. This man looked extremely similar to Chen Ji. He was dumbfounded as to how there could be two people that looked so alike in this world. Meanwhile, he rushed to send the Crown Prince back to the Eastern Palace.

The entire Royal Palace was in chaos. The Crown Princess was frenzied and blamed Prince Han for not taking care of him. She also blamed the Imperial Physician for not being capable enough. Empress Zhangsun ignored her own health and set up an altar outside of Lizheng Palace. She prayed to the heavens to bless the Crown Prince.

Only Sheng Chumu did something substantial. He returned to the Han Mansion and brought Ye Qiulang along with him to the stables. Ye Qiulang had followed Sheng Chumu to take down Qi City and capture Prince Zhao alive. He was highly approved of Sheng Chumu. Even the fact that the Crown Prince's saddle had yet to be sent to the Eastern Palace was within Sheng Chumu's expectations.

Sheng Chumu wanted to examine the saddle but the horse was extremely violent. It kicked up its back legs and did not allow Sheng Chumu to get near it. He found it strange and restrained the horse that kept kicking around. He took the saddle down. Upon a closer inspection, he found a clue. The brocade layer on the horse's saddle had been broken and there were pellets inside. The smell made him

want to choke.

Sheng Chumu recalled that the saddle was new and had just been given to the Crown Prince by Prince Han today. However, because the embroidery had a few stray strands, Consort Han had asked the seamstress in their mansion to mend it. A new saddle was broken and there were pellets in it. This was definitely linked to the Crown Prince's fall. Upon inspection by an animal doctor, they found that there was a kind of poison on the pellets that would make a horse go crazy. Because the embroidery was torn, the pellets had touched the horse's skin and caused the horse to lose control.

Sheng Chumu immediately notified Prince Han and Consort Han.

Prince Han stared at the saddle. "Won't...won't this affect me? I just gave the saddle to the Crown Prince and something happened to him!"

Consort Han was also startled. "Our relationship with the Eastern Palace is not the same as before. The reason why the Crown Prince came to hunt was for Imperial Mother. In the end, something happened to him. In the future, I don't think we will even have a superficial relationship with the Eastern Palace."

"Brother-in-law, we can't hide this. You have to tell everything to the Emperor." Sheng Chumu made the decision. "Oh right, Elder Sister, what was the name of the seamstress?"

"Xiahan." Consort Han did not understand the situation. "Why?"

Sheng Chumu narrowed his eyes. "Before the saddle was placed on the horse, the Crown Prince's imperial guards had checked it. At that time, nothing was wrong. However, after the seamstress mended it, the poison in it was exposed. Do you all think that there is something suspicious about her?"

Consort Han thought. "Yes. The brocade layer was also done by Xiahan."

Prince Han immediately ordered people to capture Xiahan while he rushed to the palace to explain everything.

Consort Han was extremely worried as she sent Prince Han off.

“Chumu, I am afraid that even if your brother-in-law tries his best, Imperial Father may believe him, Imperial Mother may believe him but the Eastern Palace may not trust that he is innocent.”

However, Sheng Chumu said, “If a person stands upright, his shadow will not bend. Nothing will happen to Brother-in-law.”

Consort Han laughed bitterly, “That’s right. This is the way of life, we can only leave it up to fate.”

Fu Rou never expected that the next time she saw Xiahan would be in the cold and sinister Imperial Prison. Xiahan was covered in streaks of blood and looking as if she was on her last leg.

Fu Rou heard from Empress Zhangsun that there was poison hidden in the horse’s saddle. After the brocade was broken, the poison had caused the horse to go crazy. As a result, the Crown Prince had fallen from the horse. Xiahan was the last person to have touched the saddle and was the most suspicious. However, no matter how much they tortured her, Xiahan did not admit to anything. Fu Rou then told the Empress that she knew Xiahan and wanted to try to convince her.

She sighed internally as she crouched down and helped Xiahan to sit up. She fed Xiahan some water.

Xiahan struggled to open her eyes. “Fu Rou? Is that you?”

Fu Rou’s expression was filled with sorrow. “Back then, you were secretly making a wedding dress for your sister. How did you end up like this?”

Xiahan smiled. “Fu Rou, you are so smart, how can you not understand.”

Fu Rou understood. “For Xiong Rui?”

“That’s right. It is for Xiong Rui.” Xiahan’s lifeless eyes suddenly shone. “In the Crown Prince’s eyes, a seamstress like me and an actor like Xiong Rui are just ants. An ant can be stepped on at any time.

How laughable is it for an ant to feel indignant and want to take revenge to kill the person that hurt it. But I am not an ant. I am a person. I know what love is and I know what hate is. Of course, I also know what it means to take revenge!”

“But none of this was the Crown Prince’s fault.” Fu Rou shook her head, her eyes filled with pain and pity. “He did not want Chen Ji to die and he never thought of taking Xiong Rui’s life.”

“If it is not his fault, then whose fault is it? Is it the Emperor’s fault? Or the Empress? To someone like me, I will never get to meet them in my lifetime! But Xiong Rui is innocent. He can’t die for no reason. Someone has to pay the price! In this world, someone should pay for Xiong Rui’s death!” Xiahhan shouted.

Fu Rou’s tone suddenly became sharp. “You---paid the price!”

Xiahhan froze.

“You could have been embroidering, enjoying simple food and watching the days pass. You could have lived a simple life. But now, you have turned into a heinous criminal that tried to kill Great Tang’s Crown Prince. The person that paid for Xiong Rui’s death was no one but yourself.”

Fu Rou believed that Xiahhan would not have been able to carry out this entire scheme by herself. There must be a mastermind instructing her. “Thankfully, the Crown Prince is lucky and managed to survive. He has regained consciousness. If not, your nimble hands would have turned into a murderer’s hands.”

Xiahhan was stunned. “The Crown Prince did not die?”

“You are very lucky. The Crown Prince is still alive.” Fu Rou tried to talk through to her. “Xiahhan, stop with your foolish ways and tell the truth. Don’t torture yourself.”

“Why does everyone think that someone instructed me?” Xiahhan’s expression changed. “But you are right. Who am I? How can I think of a plan to hurt the Crown Prince? Fine. Fu Rou, let me tell you. But you must promise to tell everything I said to the Empress.”

“Yes, I promise.” Fu Rou would have done it even if Xiahan did not ask her to.

Xiahan moved beside Fu Rou’s ears. “Everything was planned by Prince Han. Prince Han ordered me to make the saddle and sew the picture of Imperial Grandson hunting. He told me to put the poison in the saddle. Prince Han is the one who wants to kill the Crown Prince!”

In case you guys forgot, Xiahan is one of the maids that liked Xiong Rui. Xiong Rui was the guy who trained with Chen Ji (they acted together). She made something for Xiong Rui before and asked Fu Rou to hand it to him (that was the first time when Fu Rou met Chen Ji).

If you guys want more details, you should watch the drama! There are more scenes in the drama that weren't shown in the novel. The drama prepares you for the attack.

I was actually really surprised since Xiahan was not that memorable to me. I didn't expect such a minor character to attempt something so extreme.

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“That cannot be true.” Fu Rou stood up in shock. Her expression was one of alarm. “You are trying to sow discord! Has Prince Han and Consort Han ever did anything wrong to you? How can you treat them like this?!”

Xiahan paused for a moment. “When Xiong Rui died, they did not do anything!”

“That’s because they could not do anything!” Fu Rou wanted to leave. “You are unreasonable!”

Xiahan grabbed onto her. “You promised me that you would tell everything that I said to the Empress.”

“Every word that you have spoken is a lie.” Fu Rou will not be used by others.

Xiahan suddenly shouted aloud, “It was Prince Han! He was the one that tried to kill his own brother! He was the one that used me to plot against the Crown Prince! It was Prince Han! Prince Han is the murderer!”

Fu Rou turned to grab onto Xiahan’s shoulder. “Stop talking!”

Xiahan heard the sound of footsteps and gritted her teeth. She pushed Fu Rou away and smashed her own head against the wall. Fu Rou

could not be bothered with the pain she felt in her own back and crawled up to look at Xiahn. Fresh blood flowed down her pale forehead. Her eyes slowly dimmed.

She breathed out her last breath. “Xiong Rui, wait for me...”

The image that appeared in Fu Rou’s mind was the one of Xiahn laughing and spinning as she held her sister’s wedding dress. Fu Rou felt angry and sad. *How could someone be so cruel as to use the true feelings between Xiahn and Xiong Rui as a chance to kill and achieve their own motives?*

When Fu Rou returned to Empress Zhangsun’s side, she told the Empress everything that Xiahn had said. On one hand, it was the promise that she made to Xiahn. On the other hand, she had faith in the Empress.

“How evil and malicious they are to drive a wedge between the royal family.” *Alas, Empress Zhangsun was wise.*

“I also felt that Xiahn was not speaking the truth. However, I had promised her that I would tell whatever she said to Your Majesty.” Fu Rou breathed a sigh of relief.

“Someone is making use of her.” Empress Zhangsun thought that this was extremely obvious.

“What a pity that she refused to say who it was before she died.” There was nothing Fu Rou could do.

“I heard that you are injured.” Empress Zhangsun gestured to Wei Song. Wei Song presented a tray. “This is a Golden-thread Heavenly Armour. It was given by the Western regions. It is light, flexible yet strong against swords. I am giving it to you to protect yourself.”

Fu Rou immediately rejected, “This is too precious. It should be given to a brave general to use in battle. I am always in the palace and have no use for this Golden-thread Heavenly Armour. I am afraid that it will go to waste.”

Empress Zhangsun was adamant. “Do you think that the interior of the palace is not a battlefield? Take it. I depend highly on you and

want to protect you.”

“Thank you for the gift, Your Majesty.” Fu Rou accepted the Golden-thread Heavenly Armour.

“Fu Siyan, I do not wish for there to be any misunderstandings between the Crown Prince and Prince Han.” *She would still say what needs to be said.*

“Your Majesty, please rest assured. I will not tell anyone a single word of what Xiahan said.” Fu Rou thought about it and decided to say it just in case. “However, although there were only two of us at that time, Xiahan was shouting towards the end and tried to attract the attention of the prison chief. I am not sure if the prison chief heard her.”

Zhangsun nodded, indicating that she understood. After waiting for Fu Rou to leave, she instructed Wei Song to get ready to go to the Eastern Palace. She was afraid that the news would leak out. She was going to personally tell the Crown Prince everything to prevent them from falling for someone’s conspiracy.

The Crown Prince was lying on his bed. Sun Lingshu was attending to him.

Lu Yunji was telling him that Xiahan said that Prince Han was the mastermind before she passed on. The Crown Prince was startled. “Prince Han? How can that be?”

Sun Lingshu immediately fumed as soon as she thought of the Han Mansion. “Why not? Ever since Prince Han returned victorious, Imperial Father had looked highly upon him. His rewards are growing by the day. A person’s desire has no limits.”

“Crown Princess understands.” Lu Yunji agreed, “I am not being bold as to sow discord in Your Highness’ relationships but the truth is as such. Prince Han was the one who invited Your Highness to hunt. Prince Han was also the one who gave Your Highness the saddle. From what I heard from the Justice Office, that woman named

Xiahan had touched Your Highness saddle before the hunt started, in order to mend it. May I ask Your Highness, who was the one that called for Xiahan before you set off?"

The Crown Prince recalled. "It was Consort Han."

Sun Lingshu added more fuel to the flame once again. "So she has a part to play. In order to get the Crown Prince position, Prince Han and Consort Han want to kill Your Highness. Your Highness, you can't just let this go."

The Crown Prince fell silent for a while. "I know. As long as I am the Crown Prince, I can never have a day of peace. But what can I do if I don't bear with it? You all don't know how much Imperial Father and Imperial Mother both love Prince Han. Now that that seamstress has already died, there is no evidence. If I tell them that Prince Han wants to hurt me, they will never believe me. Instead, they will scold me for being suspicious of my own brother. My position will be worse." He already knew that in order to protect his Crown Prince's position, he could not rely on his father or mother.

"You are also their biological son and their eldest son. Now that the criminal has committed suicide for no reason, a dead person cannot testify. Prince Han clearly wants to hurt you. It is not that you cannot stand Prince Han. No matter how biased they are to Prince Han, they will have to speak fairly." Sun Lingshu had already forgotten that the Crown Prince was the one who recommended Prince Han to lead the troops in the first place.

"How bold! It is very common for a prisoner to fear punishment and commit suicide in prison. What do you mean no reason? Upon knowing that they cannot live, they try their best to pull others down with them. They will speak without thinking and try to conspire against Prince Han. This is clearly nonsense. As the Crown Princess, you can't differentiate from right and wrong nor can you stop your own mouth. You only dare to say that the Emperor and I are biased behind our backs! Who gave you such courage to tell tales in front of the Crown Prince?" Empress Zhangsun's voice resounded in the room as she walked in. Her expression was fierce. "Guards, come and slap the Crown Princess!"

Sun Lingshu knelt in fright. Lu Yunji kneeled as well. "The Crown Princess spoke unintentionally. Please calm down, Your Majesty."

"Lu Yunji, you move in and out of the Eastern Palace so easily. Do you want me to ask His Majesty whether it is appropriate to so openly support the Crown Prince?" Empress Zhangsun threw Lu Yunji a cold look.

Lu Yunji could only claim that he did not dare and quickly take his leave. Meanwhile, an internal attendant was slapping Sun Lingshu quickly.

Empress Zhangsun ignored the Crown Prince's pleas. It was only until Sun Lingshu's face was filled with red marks did Empress Zhangsun call to stop. "On account of the Crown Prince's injury, I will keep the punishment light today. In the future, if you ever dare to run your mouth and sow discord between the Crown Prince and Prince Han, I will not hold back on punishing you. Get out!"

Sun Lingshu did not dare to say another word as she bowed and backed out of the room.

Empress Zhangsun looked at the Crown Prince. "Rumours are often more dangerous than a blood-covered blade. Crown Prince. You, Prince Han and Prince Qin are all my flesh and blood. You are all biological brothers that will still be related even if your arms are cut off. You must definitely not believe rumours that intentionally try to sow discord."

The Crown Prince frowned but did not say anything. Empress Zhangsun asked, "Crown Prince, why aren't you saying anything?"

"I don't know what to say." The Crown Prince got angry as soon as he spoke. "I also don't know if I have any position in your heart. If you care about me in the slightest, then please seek justice for me."

Empress Zhangsun was confused. "How will I seek justice for you?"

"You don't want me to listen to those rumours that intentionally sow discord and I will respect your advice. However, I have gotten injured this time. The Han Mansion has to take responsibility for not

taking care of me. During the hunt, Prince Han instructed someone to protect me. However, when I met with the accident and shouted for help, there was no one around. Shouldn't this person be punished?" *He had to bring someone down! If not, he would have difficulty bearing with this.*

Empress Zhangsun asked, "Who?"

"Sheng Chumu." *He was going to settle the old and new score together!*

Empress Zhangsun was stunned. "Consort Han's younger brother?"

"I cherish Prince Han as my brother. But this time, if I weren't so lucky, I am afraid I would not have been able to open my eyes and see you again. If you really care about me, you have to seek justice for me. It is a way of..." *He understood clearly that his mother cared deeply about his relationship with his brother. However, she was not as kind towards others.* "Consolation towards me."

Empress Zhangsun fell silent for a moment before nodding in agreement. *As long as she could protect the Crown Prince and Prince Han's relationship, she would do anything.*

Ughhhhhhh.

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When Fu Rou rushed to the Punishment House, the beating sounds that emerged from it made her heart clench with fear.

The Emperor had punished Sheng Chumu with a hundred strokes of the cane for not protecting the Crown Prince. He was demoted to the position of General Baiqi and had to stay in his home for a period of time to reflect. The moment Fu Rou received these news, she immediately asked Yang Bo for a favor to take care of Sheng Chumu well. However, even after Yang Bo assured her of it, she could not rest assured and decided to take a look for herself.

“Aiyo, Fu Siyan, you walk so quickly, I cannot catch my breath.” Not long later, a panting Yang Bo rushed towards her. “I already told you to rest assured. I got this.”

Meanwhile, Sheng Chumu was carried out by people. He was topless and only had an outer coat over him. As the wind blew softly, Fu Rou caught sight of blood stains on the outer coat and she immediately glared at Yang Bo.

Yang Bo was unsettled by Fu Rou's glare and he said, “His Majesty ordered for a hundred strokes of the cane. We had to obey him and not miss out a single stroke. However, don't worry about it, I told them to hit him lightly.”

The wind blew stronger and the outer coat around Sheng Chumu was

blown off. Sheng Chumu's back was covered in wounds and blood streaked down his back. Fu Rou immediately shot another glare at Yang Bo.

Yang Bo could sense her anger. "You do not know much about this. The wounds are just surface wounds, he will be fine."

Fu Rou could not bear to look at Sheng Chumu's wounds and shut her eyes. "There is no need for them to beat him until he is all bloody."

"The blood may make his injuries seem very serious but it is good if it makes His Majesty pity Sheng Chumu. Who knows? If His Majesty may feel guilty later and promote General Sheng from General Baiqi back to General Xuanwu." Upon second thought, Yang Bo said, "Sigh, this isn't right. Didn't you say that you are no longer in contact with him? Aren't you showing your heartache too obviously?"

"Don't be a busybody." Fu Rou whipped around. She had accidentally turned too fast and triggered the back injury she sustained when Xiahan pushed her down. The pain shot through her in pangs and she held the wall for support as she took deep breaths in.

"If he is injured, your heart will ache for him. If you are injured, who knows whether his heart will ache for you." Yang Bo shook his head.

Fu Rou turned around and glared at him. "It is my business if I am injured. Don't tell him!"

"Fu Siyan is easily annoyed today." Yang Bo patted his chest. "Alright, I won't tell him."

She was annoyed as she did not understand why the matter involving the Eastern Palace and Prince Han would end up implicating Sheng Chumu.

She had heard that the Crown Prince had acted by his own will and left his cavalry behind. If not for Sheng Chumu's early discovery, the Crown Prince might not have awakened so quickly. Furthermore, it was also Sheng Chumu who suspected Xiahan's involvement after investigating and discovering the oddities with the saddle. In the end,

not only was he not rewarded, he was also punished by a hundred strokes of the cane.

A hundred strokes! In the past, Rites Official Situ had also received a hundred strokes of the cane and passed away before she could leave the palace and enjoy the rest of her life. Fu Rou hated that number *hundred* the most! Additionally, in her opinion, the Crown Prince had specifically chosen to target Sheng Chumu and it was not only because he was Prince Han's brother-in-law.

Fu Rou also understood Empress Zhangsun well. As long as the Crown Prince and Prince Han were well, she would not care even if others were suffering. Empress Zhangsun had previously told Fu Rou that she was a mother before she was the Empress and the mother of the nation. A mother would be able to do anything for her son.

However, Fu Rou was disappointed. *At such a high position like the Empress, how could she be a typical mother? This heavenly family could never be an ordinary family because they had the responsibilities of the nation on their shoulders and they had to place the lives of all citizens first!*

Sheng Chumu returned to his residence with injuries all over his body. Madam Sheng did not waste any second before she personally applied medicine for him.

"You unfilial child!" Although she was harsh with her words, she was secretly holding back her tears. The older her child was, the more scars he had. Her only wish was for him to be healthy and safe.

"Yes, I am unfilial." The children of the Sheng family prioritised filial piety.

"Why did you have to offend the Eastern Palace?" *Who could not see the truth? It was obvious that it was a personal revenge act that was not only targetted at Prince Han.*

"I discovered Jisun Chenxin in the city a few days ago and offended His Highness by accident." The hundred strokes were not a waste.

Sheng Chumu had thought things through and understood what happened already.

That day, he led men to pursue Jisun Chenxin and lost track of Jisun Chenxin once he entered a wine house. Sheng Chumu had suspected that Jisun Chenxin was hiding in a room and he investigated each room individually. Jisun Chenxin was once the Crown Prince's guard and Sheng Chumu had been careful during his investigations. Despite the Crown Prince's insistence that he had not seen Jisun Chenxin, Sheng Chumu searched thoroughly to the point that he even tore apart the table cloth. Ultimately, he still could not find Jisun Chenxin but he offended the Crown Prince. However, although Sheng Chumu could not find Jisun Chenxin, the coincidence was too high and his suspicions lingered.

Madam Sheng sighed, "You are insensible."

"Yes, I am insensible. But if things were to happen again, I would do the same thing." At the same time, he had to point out his stand.

Sheng Chuling could not bear it. "That is right. Mother, you are wrong. Elder Brother was on official matters. It is not Elder Brother's fault that the Crown Prince was injured. The Eastern Palace used this opportunity to vent their anger out on him. The one who is insensible is not Elder Brother but the Eastern Palace."

Madam Sheng glared at her second son. "Keep quiet! What do you know?" *With the Imperial family, common logic made no sense. The power of having status could not be contested.*

Sheng Chuling argued, "I know the difference between black and white."

"You..." Madam Sheng pointed a finger at Sheng Chuling's forehead. "Your useless brain! You are far from your Elder Brother!"

"Chuling, don't argue back with Mother."

"Mother, I would like to rest."

"Oh, okay. I will let you rest and not disturb you." Madam Sheng dragged Sheng Chuling by his ear and left, even making sure to close

the door silently.

“Mother, your biasness is becoming even worse.” Sheng Chuling struggled to get away and rubbed his ear. Madam Sheng glared at him. “What is wrong?” She wanted to smack Sheng Chuling but Sheng Chujun whistled a tune and walked over.

“Sheng Chujun, I haven’t been seeing you around these few days. Where have you gone?” Madam Sheng immediately turned her attention away.

Sheng Chuling felt that his pained heart had been healed. *Thank goodness for the youngest in the family. Even if he could not compare to his elder brother, he still had his younger brother.*

“Oh right, Sheng Chujun. Something big happened at home. Where did you go?” *Furthermore, he could use this opportunity to get on his mother’s good side.*

“Mother, Second Brother, let me show you guys something good.” Sheng Chujun seemed oblivious to the tense atmosphere and he pulled out a paper from his waist. He spread the crumpled paper out on the floor. “I worked very hard these few days! Look at the handprints on this. They represent the compliments and good words the citizens of Chang’an have to say for me. Now, I am probably the most famous rich playboy in the Chang’an! Hahaha! By the time I propose my marriage to the Sun Residence, I will let Sun Tan see this sheet of paper. This will be the evidence that I am a respected and famous person. In addition, I will bring spectacular betrothal gifts for him. Then, I can marry his daughter.”

“Who did you say you want to marry?” Both Madam Sheng and Sheng Chuling asked at the same time.

“The second daughter of the Sun family, Sun Lingwei.” Sheng Chujun was meticulous for his marriage. “Do you guys really want to let Elder Brother marry Sun Lingwei?”

Sheng Chuling shook his forefinger. “Elder Brother will definitely not agree to marry her.”

Sheng Chujun heaved a sigh of relief. "Then I can be rest assured."

Madam Sheng shook her head. "You will not be able to marry her."

Sheng Chujun asked in shock. "Why not?"

"Because her sister is the Crown Princess." Sheng Chuling had not imagined that his younger brother would actually fall for the Sun family's daughter. He felt that it was an ill-fated relationship.

"So what?" Sheng Chujun wore a blank face.

"Elder Brother has been caned. The Crown Prince did not want to make things hard for Prince Han and his wife in front of the Empress, so he took his anger out on Elder Brother. The Crown Princess also did not help and both husband and wife backed each other up."

"Lingwei said that her sister is gentle and kind, she would not even step on an ant." Sheng Chujun could not believe it. "Could this be a misunderstanding?"

"Our innocent Elder Brother was caned with a hundred strokes. Do you know what the Crown Princess did? She told the internal attendants to hit him strongly without any mercy. Xinnan had personally overheard this." Sheng Chuling had a reliable source.

"But..." *This did not concern Lingwei at all.*

Madam Sheng said, "There are no buts! Chumu barely survived! The eldest daughter of the Sun family is too vicious and the younger daughter will not fare any better. If you interact with any Sun family member again, I will break your leg!"

Sheng Chujun's face immediately turned solemn.

Court Lady

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Lu Yingying trudged towards Grand Prince Liang's room. She spotted Yan Zifang from behind but her expression did not change as she kneeled down to help the drunk Grand Prince Liang take off his shoes. Grand Prince Liang narrowed his eyes and stared at Lu Yingying for a while before he suddenly lifted his feet and kicked her.

Yan Zifang took a step out subconsciously.

Although he had already mentally prepared himself and knew that Lu Yingying was suffering, he had not imagined that she would be bullied like that. She was as skinny as paper and her complexion was as white as a ghost. The clothing she wore looked like rags and she did not seem like a consort at all. She could not even compare to a regular palace maid. He still remembered how beautiful she was when they first met. She was like a fairy who was out of this world. The stark contrast between then and now made his eyes and heart hurt.

Grand Prince Liang held Yan Zifang and pointed at Lu Yingying. He bellowed, "Let me tell you. You definitely have not met someone as dirty as her! She could have been the respected Consort Liang and my beloved wife but she was not willing and she chose to be a bitch instead!"

Grand Prince Liang yanked Lu Yingying's arm and shook her

violently. "Bitch, why are you not speaking? Talk! Don't make it seem like I am mistreating your pitiful self! You are the only one who knows that it is you who shamed me! You have always been shaming me! I will strangle you to death! I will strangle you!" Grand Prince Liang placed his hands around Lu Yingying's neck coldly.

Lu Yingying's face turned red but she did not make any sound.

Yan Zifang stealthily walked closer to Grand Prince Liang. All of a sudden, Grand Prince Liang collapsed onto Lu Yingying's shoulder, completely drunk.

Lu Yingying supported Grand Prince Liang with her arms, preventing him from falling. She glared coldly at Yan Zifang but remained calm. Yan Zifang followed her gaze and stared at his own hands. He had unconsciously taken out a dagger.

He came to a realisation. "Right, it would not be good if blood can be seen. I can make it seem like he died from drinking too much. No one will suspect us. A drunkard like him will not live long anyway."

Lu Yingying struggled with all her might to support Grand Prince Liang back to his bed. "If you dare to touch a single strand of hair of his, I will scream and call everyone in the residence here."

"Lu Yingying, has he made you dumb with his beatings?" *He wanted to save her.*

"He is my husband." She will handle the consequences of her choice. "Although he hits and tortures me, I was the one who made the wrong move first. At least, he has given me status. What about you? What can you give me?"

"What do you want me to give you?" *Aside from marriage.*

"Yan Zifang, you are too poor. You cannot give me anything." *She had thought things through.*

"So you would insist on staying here and receive his torture to make me guilty?" *He wanted to add that this was useless but he knew that it would be a lie.*

“Keep your volume down. My husband is asleep, don’t wake him up.” She did not even bother to look at Yan Zifang.

Anger boiled within Yan Zifang and he stomped out of the room. However, he heard Lu Yingying singing a song. It was the song she sang when they had first met. Unfortunately, she was now singing it to another man. He did not know why but the pain in his heart seemed to threaten to tear him up internally.

The Crown Prince lay on his bed and lifted his hand to carefully caress Sun Lingshu’s face. Sun Lingshu also raised her hand but she used it to block the Crown Prince’s view. She did not want him to see her ugly state.

The Crown Prince held her hand. “You have suffered because of me. I swear that when I ascend the throne and become the Emperor in the future, you will always be my Empress. You will stay beside me forever.”

Sun Lingshu gently lay beside him.

“Let me tell you. When I fell down the horse, I had a vision for a moment and I thought that I saw Chen Ji.” He was honest with her.

She turned around, facing him with concerned eyes.

“Chen Ji came to my side and he touched my neck like he was trying to comfort me and persuade me to persevere. I knew that Chen Ji did not leave me behind, his soul is always by my side. Every time I meet with danger, he would appear and help me.” The Crown Prince could not help smiling.

Sun Lingshu was quiet.

“Why are you quiet? Did I make you unhappy by talking about Chen Ji?”

“No, I am very happy. If Your Highness is telling me about Chen Ji, it means that you are treating me like I am yours.” Sun Lingshu’s tone was sincere and she wore a smile. “I was quiet because I suddenly

recalled that when the soldiers brought you back, they also brought back another man. The man claimed that he was in the mountains picking herbs and because of suspicions, they locked him in prison. Could it be that you mistook that man for Chen Ji?"

"That is very possible." The Crown Prince laughed and shook his head. "Forget it, I will not mention Chen Ji anymore. I will let him go and when he reincarnates, his next life will definitely be better than his past one."

Yet, Sun Lingshu stood up and instructed the guards to bring the herb picker in.

"You..." *He did not understand her actions.*

"When you were talking about Chen Ji, your happiness was something that I have not seen in a long time. It made me curious about that herb picker. Your Highness, why don't you meet him with me?" *As long as she could see his smile, she was willing to do anything.*

Very quickly, the guards led the man in. There was a wound on the man's face and it was obvious that he had been interrogated. However, what surprised the Crown Prince and Sun Lingshu was that the man had a very similar appearance to Chen Ji.

The Crown Prince sat upwards and disbelief filled his face. "Chen Ji!"

The man knelt down. He had a steady voice. "My humble name is Fu Shui. Greetings to Your Highnesses."

The Crown prince muttered to himself, "Spilt water cannot be retrieved, Fu Shui. This name is rare."

"I am an orphan and I have been living with my foster father in the deep mountains ever since I was young. My father must have been having a hard time when he picked me up. So he gave me such a weird name. I must have made Your Highness laugh."

"Spilt water cannot be retrieved..." The Crown Prince said, "There are many things in life that we cannot turn around. Fu Shui, do you know how to play chess?"

Fu Shui answered, "I know a bit."

The Crown Prince's mood was lifted. "Good, good. Play one round with me."

Sun Lingshu had already personally prepared a chess board. The Crown Prince gave her a thankful look and made the first move. He turned towards Fu Shui. "Fu Shui, it is your turn."

Fu Shui sat beside the bed and picked up a chess piece. He took a long time to think. The Crown Prince burst out into laughter, "Do you play chess so slowly?"

Fu Shui hesitated before making his move. "I have always played chess slowly."

Sun Lingshu stared at the scene before her and she quietly made her way out of the room. *Who said spilt water could not be retrieved? At that moment, time had turned back. How wonderful!*

Yan Zifang... -_-"

Uh oh, Fu Shui is in the palace!

Court Lady

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Sheng Chumu opened his eyes. The room was dimly lit. He could faintly make out a silhouette behind the mountain-river screen and he moved silently. He got up. His body was covered in bandages. Every step affected the injury on his back. However, it did not affect his movement. He was as stealthy as a panther.

He moved around the screen. He recognised the figure. It was Lian Yan'er. He had brought her back so that her mother would stop showing him pictures of various noble ladies.

“What are you doing?” Sheng Chumu spoke after staring at Lian Yan'er for a while.

Lian Yan'er turned back in shock. She was holding a pile of books. “You scared me! I saw that the study table was in a mess and wanted to help you tidy up.”

“No need. I have my own way of arranging my stuff.” Sheng Chumu walked towards the table. He grabbed the things from her hands and placed it on the bookshelf.

“I am sorry. I won't do it in the future.” Lian Yan'er smiled slightly. “Oh right, I learned how to cook ribs from Madam. Would you like to try a bowl?”

“Did my mother give you trouble?” He had only brought her back

and had not told his mother.

“No, Madam is very nice to me.” She had opened the Belle Shop with Ma Hainiu. They had managed the majority of the noble ladies in Chang’an. Dealing with the outspoken Madam Sheng was no challenge to her.

“That is because she did not know that you have been in Swallow House before.” *If she knew, his ears would have been torn off.*

“She knows.” Lian Yan’er’s words were surprising. “I told her.”

As soon as she finished speaking, Madam Sheng entered. She was dressed in a way that made her look ten years younger. From her hairstyle to her clothes, they were all new, unique and matched really well.

“Chumu, you are up? Yan’er, you are here too.”

“Good morning, Madam.” Lian Yan’er greeted gracefully. “I will get some soup for Young Master.”

Madam Sheng waited for Lian Yan’er to walk out before exclaiming, “She is a good girl. A pity that she has had a tough life and was sold by her cruel aunt to such a dirty place. Even if she is good now, she can’t be your proper wife. However, she could still be your concubine to help you pour tea and wash your feet. Chumu, are you ok with that?”

Sheng Chumu assessed her. “Mother, your appearance today is a pleasant change.”

Madam Sheng was proud. “Aiya, I merely released my top bun, it is so-so. Nowadays, I am always making your father dumbstruck.”

Sheng Chumu imagined how his father looked with his lower jaw gaped open and stifled a laugh. “Did Lian Yan’er help you dress up?”

“Do I look good?” Madam Sheng touched her hair.

“You do.” Sheng Chumu’s tone changed. “But you can’t sell your son just to dress up.”

"You heartless brat. You are the one that brought her back. I am trying not to make things difficult for you. As a magnanimous person, I should be more open, right? Oh right, the matchmaker has sent more pictures. This time, the ladies are not bad. Hurry and choose one. You should just get married. I am waiting for a grandchild..."

Sheng Chumu pushed the naggy Madam Sheng out of the room.

Madam Sheng called out, "What are you doing?"

"His Majesty has instructed me to reflect." Sheng Chumu closed the door and said in a matter-of-fact way, "I am closing the door and reflecting."

Sheng Chuling dashed into the garden. "Mother, Elder Brother. Guess what? The Crown Prince is disabled!"

Madam Sheng frowned. "Why are you excited? This is not a good thing!"

As Great Tang's root, the fact that he was disabled was extremely unlucky. If they looked at the smaller picture, the hatred and animosity the Crown Prince had towards Prince Han and the Duke Lu Residence will become greater.

The door flew open. Sheng Chumu looked extremely shocked.

Sun Lingshu was hesitating in front of the door to the Crown Prince's study room. She saw Fu Shui appear and rushed forwards. She asked. "Where have you been these past few days?"

"I have been picking medicinal herbs in the mountain. As soon as I entered the palace, I heard that something happened to the Crown Prince." Fu Shui glanced at the tightly shut study room door. "How is His Highness?"

"Of course he is not in the best of moods. He does not want to eat. Help me to convince him." Now, Sun Lingshu looked at Fu Shui as if they were on the same side. "I specially asked the kitchen to prepare his favourite grilled fish. But when they sent it to him, he rejected it."

Fu Shui nodded and inserted his chopsticks into the grilled fish. He reached the front door. "Your Highness, it's me, Fu Shui. I am entering."

Fu Shui pushed open the door and entered. The whole place was in a mess. The things in the study room had been thrown onto the floor and the Crown Prince was curled up in a corner, looking like a cornered animal.

"I am back." Fu Shui handed the grilled fish over to him. "I brought a grilled fish for you. Didn't you say that you liked eating grilled fish?"

The Crown Prince lifted his head and spoke in a gruff tone, "This grilled fish was just lying on the plate that the internal attendants brought in. How did it suddenly become a fish that you grilled?"

"Did I say I grilled the fish?" Fu Shui shrugged. "I clearly said that I brought a fish for you."

"Quibbling." *Somehow he felt calmer.*

Everyone had been persuading him and pretending that nothing was wrong. They all told him that it was not a big deal to become disabled. However, they did not know that whenever they mentioned his leg, he would be in pain. The longer he was the Crown Prince, the more difficult it became. He had been scolded by his Imperial Father so much, it had become a norm. He has even been in prison before. Now that his leg was disabled, he was about to crumble. Only Fu Shui was talking about grilled fish as if everything was normal.

"Are you going to eat it?" Fu Shui asked.

"No." The Crown Prince's tone had already changed.

After a while, the Crown Prince looked up after not hearing a reply from Fu Shui. He wanted to scold and laugh.

Fu Shui was eating the grilled fish. "Your Highness, I am simply someone who picks herbs. I don't know how to talk about big principles. But from what I see, the world's principle is like this grilled fish. Do you think that if you don't eat it, others will follow you and starve instead of eating it? There are so many people who

want to eat it. Those people that already had their eye on the fish will take the chance to replace you. In the end, you're the one who starves to death. Whereas, other people will be full. Think about it. If you continue hiding in this corner and give away the grilled fish, who will this fragrant grilled fish be eaten by in the end? Who would be the ultimate winner?"

The Crown Prince thought deeply before his expression changed. He took the grilled fish from Fu Shui and took a huge bite. Fu Shui did not say anything more as he smiled and looked at the Crown Prince, who was eating eagerly.

"Fu Shui, do you know who you resemble?"

Fu Shui replied, "Chen Ji."

The Crown Prince was curious. "You know Chen Ji?"

Fu Shui shook his head. "No I don't. But everyone tells me that I resemble him."

The Crown Prince looked at him. "In my heart, you are him."

Fu Shui's eyes were calm and steady. "If Your Highness wants to pretend that I am him, I am fine with it. However, you have to promise me one thing. I heard that Chen Ji passed away at a very young age. I hope that Your Highness will not let me lose my life so early like he did."

The Crown Prince placed the grilled fish down. "I promise you. I will not let anyone hurt you. I will not let what happened to Chen Ji happen to you."

There was a slight change in Fu Shui's eyes.

Hey readers! I created an appendix to make it easier for you guys (in case you cannot remember who is who)

<https://www.wuxiaworld.com/page/court-lady/appendix>

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The internal attendant reported that Zhan Xuanzhi was requesting an audience.

The Crown Prince did not hesitate as he got up. “Let him wait in the study room. I will change and go over.” He turned back to look at Fu Shui. His eyes were determined. “You are right. I cannot hide in one corner. I have to protect my grilled fish.”

Although the Crown Prince spoke with determination, he was fuming when he returned. Fu Shui glanced at him before looking at the chess set. He then started setting up the chess pieces.

The Crown Prince was furious. “Zhan Xuanzhi kept nagging at me for removing the chief historian from Han Mansion from the Ministry of Appointment’s Commendation List. Prince Han has already received many rewards from his battle. Father even personally wrote him the word virtuous. That is enough and he should stop there. However, Zhan Xuanzhi lectured me and said Prince Han was Prince Han while the chief historian was the chief historian. He said that I was not fair and was foolish.”

Fu Shui spoke absent-mindedly, “So Your Highness is angry because Zhan Xuanzhi spoke up for people from the Han Mansion. That’s natural. People walk up while water flows downwards. Zhan Xuanzhi is also a person. He sees that you are not in a good situation and

chooses to side with Prince Han. It is nothing surprising.”

“Zhan Xuanzhi is siding with Prince Han?” The Crown Prince was shocked. He then shook his head. “No that cannot be. Zhan Xuanzhi was assigned to me by Imperial Father. Although his aloof face annoys me, he is not someone who is indecisive.”

Fu Shui said blandly. “I am just guessing according to common sense. You can believe me or not. Anyway, if I were you, I would guard against him.”

“How should I guard myself?” The Crown Prince had already been convinced by Fu Shui. “Zhan Xuanzhi is speaking up for Prince Han’s man so outrightly. Plus he is reasonable. If I don’t listen to him, he will bring it up to Father and I will become even more passive.”

“You are the Crown Prince. How can you not manage your own Eastern Palace personnel? Just think of a way to shut him up.” Fu Shui shrugged. “For example, ascending in brightness and falling in darkness.”

The Crown Prince murmured, “Ascending in brightness and falling in darkness?”

“On the surface, you should promote Prince Han’s subordinate. But actually, you should transfer him to a position with no power or duties. Let him become an empty frame...” Fu Shui looked into the Crown Prince’s solemn eyes and placed down the chess piece. He then turned to leave. “I have talked too much. These aren’t matters that I should be concerned with. I should leave.”

The Crown Prince called for him to stay. “Fu Shui, since you have nothing to do, come here and help me prepare ink.”

Fu Shui turned and moved smoothly over to the Crown Prince, helping him prepare ink. He looked over to look at the comments the Crown Prince was writing. “Crown Prince, you are impressive. Now, Zhan Xuanzhi will have nothing to say.”

The Crown Prince was proud. “You are also contributing by helping me prepare ink. In the future, you should help me prepare ink when I

am writing.”

Fu Shui lowered his eyes. The corners of his mouths tilted up as he agreed.

Fu Rou arrived at the garden outside Lingxiao Palace. She saw Prince Zhou in the midst of practicing sword dance. His sword was moving like a dragon as it hissed like water. Prince Zhou caught sight of her. However, he did not say anything as he turned away from her.

“I am indebted to Her Majesty for her acknowledgement of me. She allowed me to teach Prince Qin. Yesterday, Prince Qin asked me what it meant to ‘Achieve nothing due to hesitations’ I could not answer and would like to ask Your Highness.” Since she was the one asking something from him, she did not mind speaking up first.

“You usually hide from me. Only when you have a problem then do you think of me.” He swung his sword and the autumn flowers swayed. “Who do you think I am?”

“I have overstepped my boundaries.” She was slightly awkward. “I shall take my leave.”

“< <The Book of Lord Shang. Change> >” His swordplay was gentle as he brushed the red leaf that was floating in front of her and appeared in front of her. “Achieving nothing due to hesitations is from < <The Book of Lord Shang. Change> > Shang Yang believed that in order to achieve big things, one has to be decisive and cannot hesitate. If one has doubts about one’s own actions, they will not succeed nor achieve anything.”

She understood. “Thank you, Your Highness. I will take my leave now.”

He suddenly smiled. “You are leaving like this? You have no other issues?”

She was silent. She knew that he had seen through her.

“Is Sheng Chumu still being punished to reflect?” He saw her nod and

was upset. Only Sheng Chumu could make her put aside her pride. "The Empress asked Imperial Father to punish Sheng Chumu on the Crown Prince's behalf. Naturally, the Empress will not speak up for Sheng Chumu in front of Imperial Father. Therefore, you want me to do it. In your heart, am I someone who is so kind and can be repeatedly made use of?"

She was slightly astonished. "I know I should not have come but I couldn't help but try. When I think about it, I am embarrassed. Please take it as if I did not come here today."

"Sheng Chumu already has someone else." His source of news was a lot better than hers. "Lian Yan'er from Swallow House. Back then, she was Sheng Chumu's confidante. Now, she has entered the Duke Lu Residence. He is supposed to reflect at home yet he has beautiful company. He is not as lonely and pitiful as you imagine him to be. Fu Siyan, you should start thinking about yourself."

She turned sharply. "I don't believe you. Although Sheng Chumu is not perfect and we have gone through many things, he is not indecisive."

He snorted, "You are so confident in yourself? Fine! Then let's make a bet. If you lose, you have to accompany me for a day."

She silently agreed. *There was a small gap in her heart that she had always hoped to make up for. However, since Sheng Chumu did not give her a chance, she had to create one for herself!*

A few days later, the book < <Broad Geography> > was completed. Prince Han took the chance when the Emperor was happy to help Sheng Chumu get out of his house reflection punishment. Prince Zhou made an arrangement with Fu Rou to go to Duke Lu Residence on the day that Sheng Chumu had duty. When it was about time, Sheng Chumu wore a set of light armour and walked out of the door looking impressive.

Prince Zhou wanted to smile but did not. "Do you want me to go with you? I can lend you my shoulder to lie on in case you want to

cry and become too weak to stand..."

Fu Rou looked at him coldly. Prince Zhou raised both his hands in surrender. "Fine, I talked too much. Go then, I will be here waiting for you to come back crying."

Fu Rou ignored him and prepared to walk up to Sheng Chumu. However, she saw a lady run out of Duke Lu Residence. She was gorgeous and had an enchanting aura.

"Chumu, you forgot your wallet." Her movements were gentle as she pulled on Sheng Chumu's sleeve.

Prince Zhou made a yo sound. "That is Lian Yan'er."

Fu Rou pursed her lips tightly. They could hear what they were saying from where they were standing. Sheng Chumu took the wallet from Lian Yan'er. "Only you are careful."

Lian Yan'er pouted playfully. "Is being careful my only good point?"

Sheng Chumu smiled as he praised her. "Not only are you careful, you are skilled as well. You managed to deal with my mother so well." *His ears could finally rest and he did not need to worry about looking at pictures of noble ladies whenever he opened his eyes.*

Prince Zhou looked down and saw Fu Rou's pale face. "Forget it, let's return to the palace." *What kind of bet is this? He felt a stinging feeling in his heart.*

However, Fu Rou took a deep breath and walked up determinedly. When Sheng Chumu saw Fu Rou, his smile froze. Lian Yan'er took a step back but continued to hold onto Sheng Chumu's sleeve.

"What relationship do you have with this lady?" Fu Rou asked Sheng Chumu. *There are times the truth is not what you see. She wanted to hear him say it personally.*

Sheng Chumu's eyes flashed before he lifted his chin obstinately. "What relationship do I have with her?" He pulled Lian Yan'er to his side. "You have no right to ask!"

Fu Rou's eyes turned cold. "Repeat that."

Sheng Chumu's heart seemed to shrink but he remained harsh. "It will still be the same even if I say it a hundred times! Do you think I will always be a fool in front of you? Do you think I will still be devoted to you after getting played by you over and over again? From the start till the end, it was always you then let me down. Who are you to criticize me? We have already cut off our relationship and have nothing to do with each other! It does not concern you whether I have a woman by my side or am in a relationship!"

Fu Rou fell silent for a moment before chuckling in bitter silence. "Okay, I understand."

Sheng Chumu looked at Fu Rou's departing figure as his hand that was on Lian Yan'er's shoulder fell weakly to his side. His anger filled gaze quickly turned cold and filled with pain.

Lian Yan'er, however, snuggled tightly up to him. "Chumu, your speech just now was so powerful."

"Ah?" Sheng Chumu stared blankly. "Just now? What did I say?"

Lian Yan'er smiled gently. "You said that that woman treated you like a fool and kept playing you. You said that you have already cut off all ties with her and have nothing to do with her. You were so grand and manly when you said it."

Sheng Chumu suddenly yelled, "No!" He rushed in the direction that Fu Rou was leaving as he shouted. "Rou'er, I don't mean what I said!"

What was he playing at? He had been intentionally avoiding her recently and even went to the borders. But all it did was to embed her shadow more deeply into him. This time, she came to find him on her own accord. Isn't this the best chance for him to step down?

However, when Sheng Chumu turned the corner, he quickly halted in his steps. Once again, he looked on as Fu Rou extended her hand out to Prince Zhou and rode away with him.

"Sheng Chumu, how many times do you want to get played by her? How many times must it be before you are done?" He grabbed the

small dagger by his waist and fiercely stabbed it into his thigh. Fresh blood gushed out. He did not even frown. "I swear on my own blood that I will not make the same mistake ever again. I will not have any hope for Fu Rou anymore. I will not be delusional, obsessed or stubborn! Even if she kneels and begs me, I will not give in!"

omg Chumu is too rash...T_T

What do you think Fu Shui's goal is?

Court Lady

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The sandalwood gave out a string of distinct smoke. The Crown Princess was arranging flowers. Pine branches and chrysanthemums were the main highlight while reed grass was used to decorate. The entire set up looked noble. Consort Han sat by the side, sipping tea with her eyes lowered. One small sip, another small sip. She looked graceful and carefree. One could not be bothered while the other had nothing to say.

As Consort Han drank her tea, she cursed Prince Han in her heart. Prince Han had taken credit for Sheng Chumu and expressed that he may have done something wrong. He should not have presented the < <Broad Geography> > book on the first court session that the Crown Prince attended after hurting his leg. It seemed like he was trying to steal the Crown Prince's limelight. The Crown Prince was unhappy. Hence, he wished for Consort Han to accompany the Crown Princess. He wanted her to chat, give a gift and laugh with her, in hopes of salvaging some of their brotherhood.

Ever since the Crown Prince was injured, Consort Han had never visited. First of all, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess had made use of the situation to make her husband suffer. Secondly, they were petty and had caused her younger brother to suffer. She recalled how this couple had forced her husband to go onto the battlefield. She did not even complain. In the end, because of some nonsense spouted by a seamstress, the couple started to have the intent to hurt them and

was dictating what was right and wrong.

The truth was ever since the Crown Prince married Sun Lingshu, the relationship between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion had deteriorated. Sun Lingshu only knew how to convince the Crown Prince by making use of their couple relationship. *Sun Lingshu has already given birth to an Imperial Grandson and gained the Crown Prince's love. She should have cheered up. Why does she still have such a sinister aura?* Ultimately, Consort Han was from a military general family and she could not stand the Crown Princess.

However, as Consort Han saw that her teacup was almost empty, she thought of her husband's plump face and round eyes. Her heart softened.

"I haven't been feeling well recently and could not come and greet Your Highness and the Crown Prince. I hope you do not blame me." *She would bear with it. Who told her to be a good wife.*

"Why would I blame you, Consort Han?" Sun Lingshu wore a superficial smile. "I am glad. The Crown Prince and Prince Han went to hunt and the Crown Prince returned severely injured. He frightened me to death. Thankfully, Prince Han is safe. I am glad on your behalf."

Consort Han could not stand it. "That's right. When Prince Han went to Qi City, I was on the edge and could barely sleep. But I felt a lot better when I thought that we were helping the Crown Prince and you with your troubles. This time, the Crown Prince has gotten injured. We found it hard to eat or sleep peacefully. After all, we are related."

Sun Lingshu sounded sluggish as she changed the topic. "Consort Han, did you know the seamstress, Xiahan?"

"This..." *Is she for real?* Consort Han sighed. "There are so many people in the Han Mansion. It is not easy to know all of their characters."

Sun Lingshu immediately mocked, "It is so difficult to judge a normal person's character, much less an assassin. I am in charge of the

Eastern Palace and understand how you feel. It is not easy taking care of your residence.”

Consort Han opened her mouth and ultimately forced herself to smile. She gestured for a palace maid to present the gift. “The Crown Prince is busy. I should not disturb you. This is a one hundred year old ginseng. It is a small gift for the Crown Prince to replenish his health.”

Sun Lingshu glanced at it expressionlessly.

Consort Han got up and left. She knew that if she continued bickering, this conversation would never end and she did not want to stay in the Eastern Palace any longer.

The next morning, Sun Lingshu presented the gift box to the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince paled as soon as he saw what was inside. He flipped the entire box and a dried tiger’s claw fell to the floor.

“Ridiculous!” The Crown Prince fumed.

Sun Lingshu exchanged glances with Fu Shui before adding angrily, “Consort Han personally sent this over. She said that since your leg was not well, we should make soup with this tiger’s claw. Replenishing one’s shape according to another.”

“Although my leg has some problems, my teeth are still sharp.” The Crown Prince swiped his sleeve and walked away.

Sun Lingshu smiled at Fu Shui. “That was a good idea.”

The previous night, Fu Shui had supported the drunk Crown Prince from Grand Prince Liang’s place. He coincidentally saw the old ginseng that Consort Han had given. Sun Lingshu took the chance to complain that she was worried that the Crown Prince’s heart would soften as soon as he saw the gift. Fu Shui then gave her this idea.

Fu Shui replied, “Everything we’re doing is for the Crown Prince.”

Sun Lingshu nodded. “That’s right. As long as the Crown Prince is well, we will be well.”

The Emperor went to the recuperate at the Hot Spring Palace and instructed the Crown Prince to take over ruling the country. The Crown Prince took action against the Literature School. He openly promoted the authors that contributed to the book but immediately demoted anyone who made a slight mistake. He then used completely irrelevant issues to sack people. Everyone in the Literature School was complaining to Prince Han but Prince Han could not do anything. He could not ask Consort Han if she had said something wrong to the Crown Princess that would make the Crown Prince behave so harshly.

However, the Crown Prince's nonsensical actions also angered Zhan Xuanzhi. Zhan Xuanzhi felt that the Crown Prince was not differentiating his personal grudges from his official duties and was behaving immorally to his brother. Zhan Xuanzhi felt that the Crown Prince had lost his rationality because of his selfish desires. The Crown Prince had been putting up with Zhan Xuanzhi but decided that he could not stand it anymore. He questioned Zhan Xuanzhi if he had turned to side with Prince Han.

Zhan Xuanzhi was startled. "Do I have a selfish motive or is there someone treacherous by your side?" He had already heard that someone, who looked a lot like Chen Ji, had entered the Eastern Palace.

The Crown Prince knew that he was referring to Fu Shui and could not help but become furious. "How dare you!"

Zhan Xuanzhi spoke, "You have yet to learn your lesson from Chen Ji. Now that you are managing the country, you have to send all members of the Eastern Palace out when you are commenting and reviewing the memorials. However, you let a herb picker remain by your side to prepare ink. If this is not treacherous, then what is? There will always be an ominous sign before a country falls!"

The Crown Prince was furious beyond belief. "How dare you curse Great Tang to fall?"

Zhan Xuanzhi did not give in. "Crown Prince, if you want Great Tang

to flourish for a long time, you should immediately get rid of Fu Shui!”

“Zhan Xuanzhi! Do you really think you can bully me? Do you think you can kill anybody you want? You turn your back on me for your own selfish gains. When I ascend the throne, I will come for your head!” The Crown Prince spoke irresponsibly.

Zhan Xuanzhi was persistent. “Your Highness can have my head. However, as long as I am still alive, I have to get rid of the treacherous being by your side!”

Zhan Xuanzhi did not hesitate to censure. It threw the Crown Prince in a bad mood. Unexpectedly, before he could return to his study room, Empress Zhangsun summoned him and lectured him. Although she was not as harsh as Zhan Xuanzhi, she was upset that he targeted his biological brother.

The Crown Prince was boiling with anger when he returned to the study room. He let out his grudges to Fu Shui. He had simply suppressed a few scholars yet his mother had scolded him sternly.

Fu Shui hid the perceptive look in his eyes and simply asked the Crown Prince if he had quarrelled with Zhan Xuanzhi.

The Crown Prince did not think much about it. *So what if they quarreled? He was afraid of Imperial Father and Mother and even had to be wary of Prince Han. Did he also have to act carefully around servants from his own Eastern Palace?*

Fu Shui then told the Crown Prince that Zhan Xuanzhi had left Chang'an. It was obvious that Zhan Xuanzhi had gone to the Hot Spring Palace to meet the Emperor and complain about him.

The Crown Prince was immediately annoyed. He knew that he had spoken too harshly. Once Imperial Father believed Zhan Xuanzhi, he would be extremely disappointed in him.

Fu Shui saw how distracted the Crown Prince was and suddenly commented, “Crown Prince, you definitely cannot let Zhan Xuanzhi go to the Hot Spring Palace.”

“That’s right! That’s right! I have to stop him!” The Crown Prince was thinking the same. At most, he would just bow.

“Understood. I will go and settle this now.” Fu Shui took the initiative to do the task and walked out.

Very soon, Fu Shui returned and told the Crown Prince that the matter had been settled. Zhan Xuanzhi was already dead and a dead person would not be able to complain.

“Zhan Xuanzhi is dead?” The Crown Prince was frantic as he immediately felt something was wrong. “How can that be? All I asked you to do was to chase him to bring him back!”

“I pretended that I received your orders and asked the Imperial Guards to kill Zhan Xuanzhi.” Fu Shui replied honestly.

“You!” The Crown Prince shook Fu Shui’s shoulders. “What have you done?! Zhan Xuanzhi was specially appointed by Imperial Father to assist me. If I kill him, how am I any different from Prince Zhao?”
This was going to cause a huge ruckus!

Fu Shui took out a memorial. “This was the memorial that Zhan Xuanzhi was intending to hand over to the Emperor. Please have a look.”

The Crown Prince took the memorial and read it. His frown deepened. In the memorial, Zhan Xuanzhi said that Fu Shui was the second Chen Ji. He was treacherous and nasty. He wanted the Emperor to deal with Fu Shui like how he dealt with Chen Ji.

Fu Shui asked blandly, “How did the Emperor deal with Chen Ji? I heard that it was Your Highness that personally killed Chen Ji to express your determination to turn over a new leaf?”

The Crown Prince denied, “It wasn’t me! Chen Ji committed suicide.”

“If Chen Ji did not commit suicide, would you have killed him?” Fu Shui paused and sighed, “Chen Ji did not want to put you in a spot and chose to kill himself. He could die for you. I can do it too. I was the one that caused Zhan Xuanzhi’s death. If he did not die, I would have to die. If you think that I have done wrong, I will accept death

as my punishment.” He flipped his hand over, showing the dagger that he already held in his hand. He moved to pierce it in his heart.

“Stop!” The Crown Prince immediately grabbed onto Fu Shui’s wrist. “I said that I will not let the same tragedy that happened to Chen Ji, happen to you. You are the only friend that I trust. You can’t leave me behind.”

Fu Shui looked at the Crown Prince, slightly moved. “Your Highness, you trust me so much. I am willing to die for you!”

The Crown Prince is so foolish...

Court Lady

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Yan Zifang was drinking in his garden when he saw Ma Hainiu return with a jewel box. She wore an unsatisfied expression.

“Is the Belle Shop not doing well?” As the leader and an investor, he should show a bit of concern.

“The Belle Shop is doing well. Today, I went to visit Consort Han and brought a lot of new jewellery for her to see but she did not want any of them. In the past, she has been my most loyal customer!” Therefore, Ma Hainiu was bothered.

“Why didn’t she want any?” Yan Zifang asked.

“Now that the Crown Prince and Prince Han are on such bad terms, she has no mood.” Ma Hainiu shook her head. “They are biological brothers!”

Yan Zifang’s mouth pulled up in a sneer. “Royals are emotionless.”

“Oh right, Consort Han told me that when the Crown Princess was still a lady from the Sun family, it was Consort Han and Prince Han that helped her when she came to the Han Mansion to get the attention of the Crown Prince. The Crown Princess did not have any chance of winning initially and she only won because of the idea Fu Rou gave her to add ribbons and flower petals under her skirt. When she danced, the flower petals fell like rain and she managed to defeat

Lu Yingying and become the Crown Princess. Clearly, the Han Mansion did a favour for the Crown Princess. But now that the Crown Prince and Prince Han are not getting along, not only is she not helping, she is making matters worse.”

Yan Zifang seemed to ponder. “Since the Crown Princess is ungrateful, then you should speak up for justice and tell her ugly side to everyone.”

Ma Hainiu hesitated, “But leader, if I do that, won’t it cause the relationship between the Han Mansion and the Eastern Palace to worsen? I don’t think it is right.”

Yan Zifang raised his brows. “Does Consort Han treat you well?”

Ma Hainiu nodded. “Very well.”

Yan Zifang continued asking, “Do you want to help Consort Han punish the Crown Princess?”

Ma Hainiu spoke frankly, “Yes.”

Yan Zifang spoke in a slightly commanding tone, “Then you should do as I say.”

Ma Hainiu did not sense his tone but simply thought that this was not right.

“Do you think that the relationship between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion will improve if you do not do anything? Now, the two families have irreconcilable differences. We can either not do anything or we can help Prince Han.” If ordering her would not work, he would try to use reason.

Now, Ma Hainiu understood reasoning very well. “Helping would definitely be better than sitting around.”

Alas, Ma Hainiu listened to reason better. She would definitely help Prince Han’s side. *In three days, she would ruin the Crown Princess’ reputation!*

Three days later.

“What!” Sun Lingshu threw a teacup on the floor.

“Those women ganged up together and are making fun of this. I don’t know how the news of what happened on the Crown Princess Selection day spread.” Shuangxi told Sun Lingshu of the rumours that had been spreading wildly outside the palace.

“Is there a need to ask? Who else would it be other than Consort Han? Despicable!” Sun Lingshu did not even need to think. Now that the Crown Prince was targeting the Literature School, Prince Han would naturally be anxious. However, she did not expect for things to turn in her direction.

The internal attendant announced that Chief Yu had arrived.

Sun Lingshu calmed down slightly before ordering the mess to be cleaned up. She then allowed Yu He to enter. “Greeting, Your Highness.” Yu He knelt to greet her.

“Chief Yu, what major thing brings you here personally?” From Sun Lingshu’s expression, it was clear that she appreciated Yu He’s big greeting.

“Concubine Yan heard that the Crown Prince is helping to review memorials on behalf of the Emperor and hasn’t been sleeping well. She asked me to send some lingzhi over to help replenish His Highness’ energy.” Yu He presented the lingzhi.

“Concubine Yan is so thoughtful.” Sun Lingshu gestured to Shuangxi to accept it. “Chief Yu, please help me to thank Concubine Yan when you return.”

Yu He politely took his leave. Shuangxi looked at the lingzhi. “I never thought that Concubine Yan would give the Crown Prince a gift.”

Sun Lingshu spoke arrogantly, “Imperial Father is not around now and the Crown Prince is the one managing the country and has absolute power. Do you think that she and Prince Zhou dares to try anything? On the other hand, the Han Mansion is not tactful.”

Yu He did not walk very far before he heard laughter. He walked to a desolated old wall in the Eastern Palace. There was already somebody there waiting for him.

Yu He spoke, "With you in the Eastern Palace and Yan Zifang outside, the relationship between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion is up in flames. We are just waiting for the last strike and everything will go up in flames. Fu Shui, you have done well."

That person turned around. Fu Shui was polite. "You are too generous with your praises, Father."

From Hong Yide all the way to Xiahan, the Crown Prince was repeatedly met with bad luck. Furthermore, they were getting closer to their goal. Zhan Xuanzhi was absolutely right. His Fu Shui was treacherous and nasty. But he would never be a Chen Ji because Chen Ji was way too foolish.

On this day, there was a sumptuous banquet at Lizheng Palace.

Empress Zhangsun thought that after she reprimanded the Crown Prince, he would reflect. Unexpectedly, the Crown Prince became even more harsh and reduced the Literature School's funds. The scholars were all dismissed and it was obvious as to how Prince Han would react. Moreover, she had also roughly heard about the rumours that the woman in the city were spreading. She did not expect that Consort Han and the Crown Princess were also at loggerheads. All these were making her worried. She could not eat nor sleep well and thought that it was strange that things came to this stage.

Fu Rou saw that Empress Zhangsun was becoming more frail by the day and suggested holding a family banquet. Perhaps the brothers and their wives could talk things out and resolve their conflict.

"It is the Crown Princess' birthday. Our family should gather and celebrate." Empress Zhangsun smiled as she waved her hand. A palace maid walked up with a tray in her hands. "Crown Princess, this is a new sable fur coat that I had just gotten and thought that it

looked nice. The weather is getting cold and it is about time to use it. Take this as my present for you.”

Sun Lingshu got up. Her makeup made her look happy as her eyes narrowed in a smile. “I am younger than you, I wouldn’t dare to ask Imperial Mother to remember my birthday, much less give me a gift.”

Sun Lingshu was pretending to be courteous. Before she came, she had already known that Empress Zhangsun had recently received two sable fur coats. Empress Zhangsun had kept the white one for herself and intended to give the black one to her. Sun Lingshu was actually feeling annoyed that the weather was turning cold and she had nothing to wear. She was waiting to receive the fur coat at the banquet.

Empress Zhangsun said, “There is nothing to be courteous about. You have been serving the Crown Prince in the Eastern Palace and also taking care of the young Imperial Grandson. I know it must be difficult on you. Today, everyone is part of the family, there is no need to be courteous.”

It was then that Sun Lingshu thanked the Empress and took the fur coat. She could not hide the pride in her eyes as she looked at Consort Han.

Empress Zhangsun noticed that Consort Han made a gesture to stop at the palace maid that was helping her pour drinks. She asked in concern, “Consort Han, why aren’t you letting them pour you anymore drinks? Are you not feeling well?”

Consort Han became shy and did not speak. As she saw Prince Han about to answer on her behalf, she immediately pinched him. Prince Han obediently shut his mouth and simply let out a silly breath.

Fu Rou saw this and spoke softly. “Perhaps it is not convenient for her body?”

Empress Zhangsun came to a realisation. “Are you pregnant?” Seeing how Consort Han still did not reply, she knew that Consort Han was silently acknowledging. She could not help but be overjoyed. “It is such a joyful matter, how can you hide it from me?”

Seeing how things had already been exposed, Prince Han smiled. "Imperial Mother, the Imperial Physician has not confirmed it. I had intended to wait for the confirmation in about half a month before telling you."

Empress Zhangsun found it weird. "Wait? It is about time. I have waited for this day for so long that my neck has grown. After hearing this news today, I feel as if I have recovered by a lot. Come servants, help to top up the wine. I am going to drink a cup. Consort Han, you don't have to drink. Give her honey."

Consort Han took a sip of honey and suddenly coughed lightly. Prince Han immediately became anxious. "Why are you coughing? Have you caught a cold?"

Empress Zhangsun was even more anxious. "Quick. Bring my white sable fur coat. Help Consort Han wear it. She must not catch a cold now."

The internal attendants rushed to get the white sable fur coat and handed it over to Prince Han.

Prince Han hurried to place it over Consort Han. He did not forget to butter up to his mother. "Imperial Mother, this sable fur coat is really beautiful. What a good item."

Empress Zhangsun smiled. "You have discerning eyes. This had also just been given. I haven't even used it before giving it to Consort Han."

Consort Han wanted to stand up to thank her but Zhangsun waved her hand. "You don't have to get up to thank me. I said that today's banquet is for our family and there is no need to be courteous."

Sun Lingshu pulled a long face as jealousy and hatred grew within her. *Consort Han had ruined her reputation. Not only that, she was pregnant and even got the white fur coat as a gift. Prince Han was so attentive to her as well. Consort Han had gotten everything good and she was still lacking compared to her. How could she not get angry?*

Empress Zhangsun did not notice the change in Sun Lingshu's

expression. “Crown Prince, Prince Han, both of you have not been visiting me together recently. Have you all been busy?”

The Crown Prince replied, “I have been busy with official duties and could not come to greet you often. It is my fault. Please forgive me.”

Prince Han replied, “I have been busy...” Just thinking about the Crown Prince has made him so busy he did not have time for anything else. “...with writing.”

Empress Zhangsun found it strange. “Haven’t you already completed your book < <Broad Geography> >? Are you trying to write another extraordinary book?”

Prince Han laughed in embarrassment. “I wanted to write a book to showcase Great Tang’s culture. But I don’t know who the Literature School offended recently, we are facing trouble after trouble. I am having a headache because of it. Imperial Father is not around and I don’t know what to do with my troubles.”

“You are too foolish.” Empress Zhangsun played dumb. “Although your Imperial Father is not around, your brother is here. The Crown Prince is managing the country and oversees everything. Don’t you know how to ask the Crown Prince for help?”

Prince Han snorted, “Of course I want to ask him for help. But I am afraid that even if I ask, there would be no use. If I try to ask for too much, the Crown Prince might blame me. It might not be worth it.”

“Nonsense. The Crown Prince is your older brother and he loves you very much. He will not ignore you if he sees that you are struggling. Crown Prince, don’t you agree?” Empress Zhangsun directed.

The Crown Prince was indifferent. “Imperial Mother is right. We are biological brothers and should love and respect each other.”

Zhangsun looked at Prince Han. “Did you hear that? Your brother will not ignore you.”

The Crown Prince’s tone changed. “Speaking of respect, if a younger brother offends the older brother a little, the older brother can be generous and let it go. However, if the younger brother goes

overboard, disrespecting and conspiring against the older brother. Imperial Mother, what do you think the older brother should do?"

Prince Han called out, "Imperial Mother, I don't understand. Everyone in my Literature School has been out of luck and even got their pays cut. How did I end up being the one that is conspiring?"

The Crown Prince directly bellowed at Prince Han, "You know in your heart who has been plotting against whom."

Prince Han jumped up. "Speak clearly. Who is plotting against whom?"

The Crown Prince snorted, "If we were to speak clearly in front of Mother, you won't be able to hold your head up."

Prince Han retorted, "You dare to tell the truth in front of Imperial Mother? Ever since Imperial Father went to the Hot Spring Palace to recuperate, what have you been doing? We are biological brothers and I have always been helping you. On the other hand, you keep trying to put me down. What are you trying to do?"

"Pretending to be a good person on the surface yet conspiring with officials beneath the surface to write a signed appeal to Imperial Father to impeach me. What are you trying to do?" *Don't think that he did not know what Prince Han was trying to do!*

"I...what appeal?" Prince Han was slightly guilty. Although he was not the one that led them, the group of scholars that had suffered because of the Crown Prince's actions had jointly signed an appeal. It was because the Crown Prince had pushed them too far.

The Crown Prince was stern. "If you dare to say nothing like this has happened, then swear in front of Imperial Mother. If you lie, you will suffer heaven's punishment and be punished in hell forever!"

Bam! Empress Zhangsun slammed her cup on the table.

Court Lady

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A family banquet, yet everyone's hearts were not aligned. They each had their own schemes and resentment. But like what Fu Rou said, at least they could fight it out and say whatever they wanted to say.

The Crown Prince wanted Prince Han to swear on his life and Empress Zhangsun became furious as she heard it. She questioned why there was a need to swear with such cruel words.

The Crown Prince immediately kneeled. "Imperial Mother, please calm down."

Prince Han murmured, "He is already so brazen in front of Imperial Mother. There is no need to think of what happens behind her back."

Empress Zhangsun turned her head abruptly and glared at Prince Han. Prince Han was startled as he hurried to kneel. "I have spoken too much. Imperial Mother, please calm down."

Empress Zhangsun asked sternly, "Is it true that there is a joint appeal to impeach the Crown Prince?"

Prince Han stammered, "...Yes."

Empress Zhangsun continued asking, "Did you sign it?"

"I..." Prince Han felt extremely wronged. "I had no choice. The

Crown Prince forced me and I had to protect the Literature School..."

Empress Zhangsun swiped her sleeve and the pot of alcohol fell to the ground. Sun Lingshu and Consort Han ran up and knelt in fear.

Empress Zhangsun opened her mouth, "You...you all have really done well--" She suddenly spat out blood!

Both couples simultaneously shouted, "Imperial Mother."

Fu Rou supported Empress Zhangsun and ordered for the palace maids to bring her medicine. She took out one pill from the medicine bottle and gave it to Empress Zhangsun to take.

Empress Zhangsun shook her head and pushed it away. Her eyes were moist. "The Xuanwu Gate Coup is still vivid in everyone's mind. Crown Prince Li Jiancheng, Prince Zhao Li Yuanji and our Emperor were all biological sons of Empress Dowager Dou. They were biological brothers but in the end they could not coexist and fought against one another. Even after so many years, this is still a wound that His Majesty cannot get rid off. Do you all want that to happen to both of you as well? If you want me to watch as the both of you become enemies and cut off ties, then why don't I just give up now? Why should I take this medicine and struggle to stay alive!" She snatched the bottle of medicine from Fu Rou's hands and threw it far away.

The bottle was uncapped and the pills rolled out onto the ground.

The Crown Prince ushered forward on his knees. "I am unfilial. Imperial Mother, please do not be angry. You can scold and hit me but don't take it out on your own health!"

Prince Han moved forward on his knees as well. He picked up the pills and placed them back in the medicine bottle. Using both hands to hold the bottle, he presented it to Empress Zhangsun.

Empress Zhangsun was pale as fury burned in her eyes. "You can attack even your biological brother, why do you care about your mother? You might as well bring me poison and end my life!"

Prince Han was heartbroken. "Imperial Mother, I deserve to die! I

must have been possessed! I..." He started to slap himself with both his hands.

The Crown Prince stopped Prince Han. "Imperial Mother is already not well, she cannot be agitated further. If you hit yourself to death, won't you be even more unfilial?"

Prince Han nodded. "Yes yes! The Crown Prince is right. I will listen to the Crown Prince."

Empress Zhangsun sighed at Prince Han. "If you said this earlier and respected your brother more, would things have ended up like this?"

"That's right. If you said this earlier, why would things become like this?" The Crown Prince recalled the past. "We are brothers after all. We can discuss anything, there is no need to conspire against each other and bring things to court. It will upset both Imperial Father and Imperial Mother."

Prince Han stared. "But that is because you..."

The Crown Prince was no longer looking at Prince Han. He turned to apologise sincerely to Empress Zhangsun. "Imperial Mother, I am also at fault. It is no wonder Prince Han wants to impeach me in a fit of anger. I was too harsh on the Literature School. I will change it as soon as I get back. Imperial Mother, please take care of yourself. Don't ruin your health because of things like this. If something happens to you, how will I...be able to respect and be filial to you?"

Prince Han cried as well. "Imperial Mother, I will tear the appeal as soon as I return!"

Empress Zhangsun stretched out her hand, allowing each of her sons to hold a hand. She then held them together and said with tears in her eyes. "Good, good! Crown Prince, Prince Han, you are both my flesh and blood. You have to be united as brothers in the future."

After a few days, Empress Zhangsun's health improved. She was wondering about Consort Han's pregnancy. She invited a priest and asked if Consort Han was going to have a son.

The Taoist Priest did some planchette writing on a sand table. His expression slowly turned bad. In the beginning, he was slightly hesitant and did not want to speak. However, as Empress Zhangsun pressed him, he finally said that not only would Consort Han not have an heir, she would also overthrow her husband.

Empress Zhangsun believed that the priest was talking nonsense and sent him away. However, after he left, she was frowning and felt suffocated. She lifted her hand to press on her chest.

Fu Rou, who was standing by the side, spoke up. “Your Majesty, there is no need to pay attention to him. This priest clearly has not finished practicing austerity and cannot read the signs from heaven. People who are undeserving can only use their words to make a living. Their tactic is to use false words to intimidate people. First they will make you scared, then they will tell you the solution. They will then take the chance to make money from you. If Your Majesty did not chase him away then, he would have told you that if you donated a certain amount of money to the Taoist temple, it will be able to change the inauspicious sign that Consort Han has to a huge auspicious sign.”

Empress Zhangsun laughed, “With a few sentences, you cleared the uncomfortable feeling that I was feeling. Go to the Imperial Physician and ask him to take Consort Han’s pulse. I am feeling anxious.”

Fu Rou agreed and walked out of Lizheng Palace. She looked coldly as the Taoist Priest and his disciples talked as they walked out. *They looked excited. What could make them so happy even after they were chased out by Empress Zhangsun? Who would stand to gain by devaluing Consort Han? She had someone in mind but did not want to think of it as a conspiracy.*

Empress Zhangsun thought that the family banquet had been useful and very soon, she organised a second family banquet.

Prince Han was friendly towards the Crown Prince again. The Ministry of Revenue sent news that the salary for the Literature School will be given out as per normal. They even gave an additional sum of money for the Literature School to collect the books that were amongst the commoners. The Crown Prince must be backing them.

The Crown Prince was also in a good mood. He told Prince Han to not stand on courtesy; their previous animosity had been resolved.

However, Consort Han and Sun Lingshu were still not friendly towards each other. The smiles plastered on their faces were frozen. Consort Han had heard what the priest told Empress Zhangsun. She believed that Sun Lingshu was the one that instigated that and bought over the priest, making him say those things in front of Imperial Mother to create trouble. *To say that she would overthrow her husband and be childless was not a small lesson. She was downright evil!*

“Crown Princess, I heard that you have a younger sister that is gentle and educated.” Empress Zhangsun did not notice anything wrong with the expressions of her two daughter-in-laws and suddenly asked the Crown Princess.

The Crown Princess focused on her. “My second sister is called Lingwei. She is truly obedient.”

Empress Zhangsun looked at Consort Han. “Consort Han, has any of your three younger brothers married?”

Consort Han’s hands trembled as the meat that she had picked up with her chopsticks fell to the table. Sun Lingshu, who was drinking water, choked. They both looked at each other and immediately averted their gazes. They both understood Empress Zhangsun’s intention, but they would never let that happen!

Prince Han answered on Consort Han’s behalf. “Imperial Mother, Consort Han’s three younger brothers are all still unmarried. However, as you probably know, the eldest brother, Sheng Chumu, has an illness and cannot marry.”

“Yes I’ve heard of Consort Han’s eldest brother’s illness.” Empress Zhangsun pretended not to notice Consort Han and Sun Lingshu’s reactions. “What about her second and third brother? They are fine right?”

“Ngh...this...” Prince Han looked at Consort Han. As soon as he saw her wide eyes, he immediately understood. “Her second brother, Sheng Chuling, he...he likes to drink and when he is drunk, he hits

people. He often abuses the maid that attends to him until she is covered in bruises.”

Sun Lingshu silently pulled on the Crown Prince’s sleeve. The Crown Prince also got her hint. “People who go crazy when they are drunk are not good. If he can hit his maid, he might hit his wife too. Lingwei is small and frail, I am afraid that she would not be able to withstand a few hits.”

Empress Zhangsun did not give up. “Then what about the last one? Is he also abusive?”

“Her third brother, Sheng Chujun...he...he...” Prince Han started to sweat.

“Why are you stammering? Are you trying to think of another excuse?” Empress Zhangsun was more alert than anyone else.

“No, no, how would I dare to make up an excuse?” Prince Han could not find a suitable ‘illness’. “Consort Han’s third brother, Sheng Chujun...”

The Crown Princess interfered, “Imperial Mother, actually the Crown Prince has already helped make preparations for my sister’s marriage.”

The Crown Prince looked at the Crown Princess in astonishment. He never expected that it would be his turn to use his brain juices.

“That’s right, Imperial Mother.” At a time like this, a husband had to take responsibility. “The Crown Princess only has one sister, Sun Lingwei. How can I not care about her marriage? I have already discussed with my father-in-law and made preparations.”

“Oh? Who have you made arrangements with?”

“I have made arrangements with...with...” The Crown Prince blurted out. “Lu Qi!”

“Duke Chen’s son, Lu Qi?”

Empress Zhangsun smiled. “Lu Qi has indeed performed

outstandingly in Cangshan Mountain. Speaking of which, in order to help me escape, he put his life on the line and fought the rebel Hong Yide. I owe him one.”

The Crown Princess immediately pushed forth. “Since Imperial Mother also approves of him, then why don’t you take the chance to return his favour by granting him marriage with my second sister?”

Consort Han breathed a sigh of relief and a genuine smile appeared on her face. “That’s right, he is talented and she is beautiful. They are a match made in heaven. Imperial Mother, why don’t you grant them marriage and create a beautiful story?”

Prince Han had to add on. “Since the Crown Prince approves of him, he must be good. Imperial Mother, just agree to the marriage.”

Empress Zhangsun’s gaze softened as she looked at them. “Now that you all are united, how can I not agree? Okay, I will bring it up to His Majesty.”

Fu Rou was standing behind Empress Zhangsun. She did not say anything as she saw this joyful atmosphere. However, she could not help but frown. It was obvious that there was a violent undercurrent between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion.

The Emperor returned from Hot Spring Palace. Empress Zhangsun waited happily for him to finish his court session. Unexpectedly, Wei Song brought two bad news. The first was that the Imperial Physician had checked Consort Han’s pulse and they had confirmed that she was not pregnant.

Empress Zhangsun was disappointed. “I thought that Prince Han could finally have an heir. Unfortunately, we were excited for nothing. It seems like the priest was accurate, Consort Han is destined to be childless.”

Fu Rou could not help but say, “How can you believe what the priest said? Prince Han and Consort Han are still young. They have many chances in the future. Your Majesty, you have to be patient and you

will get what you desire.”

Empress Zhangsun glanced at her. “Consort Han must have treated you very well when you are in the Han Mansion. Even after entering the palace for so long, you never forget to speak up for her.”

Fu Rou was startled and could only be careful with her words. “Consort Han did indeed treat me quite well. Ever since I entered the palace, I have received Your Majesty’s graces on numerous occasions. I just wish that Your Majesty and those around you will live in harmony.”

Empress Zhangsun shook her head. “We are the royal family. How can it be easy for everyone to be happy and harmonious?” She turned to ask Wei Song. “What is the other news?”

Wei Song replied, “During today’s morning court, You Jianming submitted a memorial. He said that the Crown Prince is disabled and cannot be treated. As the foundation of the nation, the fact that the Crown Prince is lacking would mean that Great Tang is lacking. Moreover, up until now, there has never been an emperor that is disabled. He wanted the Emperor to make Prince Han the Crown Prince for Great Tang’s future.”

Empress Zhangsun was shocked and furious. “This You Jianming, who gave him such courage?”

Fu Rou asked Wei Song, “What was His Majesty’s reply?”

Wei Song responded, “The Emperor expressed that he supported the Crown Prince. He even punished You Jianming to fifty strokes of the cane for offending the Crown Prince.”

“That’s good.” Fu Rou turned to Empress Zhangsun. “Your Majesty, as long as His Majesty does not waver, it does not matter what other people say.”

Empress Zhangsun sat down slowly, a gloomy look on her face. “No, it is not so simple. You Jianming has a nickname of Iron Mask Imperial Censor. Even if his words do not influence His Majesty, I am afraid that it will influence the other hundreds of officials. A

thousand mile embankment can be ruined by a single ant. Did you think that the officials would not have a knot in their hearts when the Crown Prince got into the accident? They just did not voice it out. Also, it was not easy to finally improve the relationship between the Crown Prince and Prince Han. Now with You Jianming's memorial, the Crown Prince might think that Prince Han has been conspiring against him."

"Your Majesty, please do not worry too much. Maybe the Crown Prince does not think that way."

An announcement was made, declaring the arrival of the Crown Prince.

"Fu Siyan." Empress Zhangsun looked into Fu Rou's calm eyes, her smile was laced with pain. "If only everyone's heart were as clear and pure as yours."

Fu Siyan did not say anything more as she backed into the corner.

The Crown Prince took big strides into the hall, his eyes were brimming with anger. He pulled his robe aside and kneeled down. "Imperial Mother, during morning court today..."

Empress Zhangsun raised her hand. "I have heard of what happened today. You Jianming offended you and was punished by the Emperor."

"What about Prince Han?" The Crown Prince was suppressing the fury within him.

"What about Prince Han?" Empress Zhangsun's expression did not change.

The Crown Prince raised his voice. "Imperial Mother, you said that as biological brothers we should be united. You said that biological brothers should respect...I listened to you. But look at what happened today. Look how Prince Han treats me as his older brother? I became disabled because I was set up. He wants me to be like Wu Taibo (Eldest son of King of Zhou) and give up my position. He wants Imperial Father to dispose of me! Prince Han is your flesh and blood

but aren't I also your flesh and blood?"

"You Jianming was the one that asked to dispose of you, not Prince Han."

The Crown Prince was in disbelief. "Up till now, you still choose to believe Prince Han?"

Empress Zhangsun frowned. "Crown Prince..." *How was she speaking up for Prince Han? He was reacting too rashly!*

"Crown Prince? A disabled Crown Prince?" The Crown Prince got up. He tilted his head towards the ceiling and laughed out loud. "Haha! I thought that I had lost a leg. I never thought that it was not only a leg that I lost but my entire self, Li Chengqian!"

Fu Rou could not stand it. "Your Highness, Her Majesty is still ill. She cannot be agitated."

The Crown Prince suddenly restrained his laughter. He wore a depressed expression. "I deserve to die. I was rude in front of Imperial Mother. I am disabled and should not be a thorn in your eyes. Imperial Mother, I will leave. I will...leave now..."

Empress Zhangsun looked at the Crown Prince as he limped out. She felt dejected and let out a series of coughs.

Fu Rou rubbed her back. "His Highness is just agitated but he is filial. When he calms down, he will ask Your Majesty for forgiveness."

"Maybe he will come back and apologise to me. But he will never let go of his suspicions and animosity towards Prince Han." Empress Zhangsun let out a long sigh and felt her energy leave her body.

Fu Rou comforted her. "Your Majesty, every matter depends on the individual. Lies will eventually be exposed and misunderstanding will eventually be cleared."

Empress Zhangsun held tightly onto Fu Rou's hand as she smiled blandly. She was hopeful.

Court Lady

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The Emperor wore a serious expression as he entered Ganluo Palace. "Tell me. How did Zhan Xuanzhi die?"

There was already someone waiting in the hall. The person turned around. It was Du Ning, his expression was filled with sorrow.

"From investigations, they said that Teacher was killed by bandits on the road. However, that is not the truth. On that day, I was supposed to go with Teacher on his journey. However, Teacher was anxious and left first. When I chased up to him, Teacher was already severely injured. He told me that there was a traitor in the Eastern Palace." Until now, the reason for Zhan Xuanzhi's death had not been made public.

The Emperor asked, "Did Zhan Xuanzhi say who it was?"

Du Ning shook his head. "Teacher had been serving the Eastern Palace and was extremely loyal and cautious. He has never let slip any news of the Eastern Palace. I am not from the Eastern Palace so Teacher did not tell me anything. I only knew that he left Chang'an to meet Your Majesty at the Hot Spring Palace. He wanted to inform Your Majesty of the situation in the Eastern Palace."

The Emperor sighed, "Before Zhan Xuanzhi passed on, did he say anything?"

Du Ning's face was filled with pain. "Teacher said...that Your Majesty had entrusted the task to him and he could not finish it. He wanted me to...protect the Crown Prince on his behalf! Your Majesty! Even in his last breath, Teacher did not forget his duty and thought only of protecting the Crown Prince! Please seek justice for Teacher and search for the traitor from the Eastern Palace and get rid of him. Please don't let Teacher die with a grievance!"

"If I search the Eastern Palace, Zhan Xuanzhi will really die with a grievance. You also know what happened during morning court today. If I search the Eastern Palace at this time, what will the Crown Prince think? What will the hundreds of officials think? I cannot reduce the Crown Prince's reputation any further."

Du Ning offered, "Since you cannot search, then please allow me to be part of the Eastern Palace. I will fulfil Teacher's wish."

"I understand your pain, but we cannot behave rashly for now." The Emperor waved dismissively. "Go back to your duties. There will be a day that I need you."

Du Ning could not do anything and could only take his leave.

The Emperor was distracted as he sat on his dragon throne. He absent-mindedly picked up a teacup and accidentally scalded his hand. His hand trembled and the cup fell to the ground.

Chief Cao kneeled. "I deserve to die for letting the hot tea scald Your Majesty!"

"I was careless. It is not your fault." The Emperor felt awkward. "Ever since young, people have learned to distinguish between things. Like this water. I have to know how to distinguish between hot and cold so that I won't get scalded or get a cold shock. Tell me, do you think the Crown Prince knows how to differentiate between hot and cold?"

Chief Cao replied carefully, "Of course the Crown Prince knows how to differentiate between hot and cold."

The Emperor continued asked, "Then what about distinguishing between black and white, good and evil or loyal and treacherous?"

Chief Cao lowered his head. "This...Your Majesty. I don't know anything and do not dare to answer. However, if His Highness does not even know how to distinguish between these things, then how will he unite the world and lead them?"

The Emperor sighed, "You are right. If he can't even differentiate between these nor stand the turbulence in front of him now, how can I rest assured to leave Great Tang in his hands? Traitor? Previously, it was Chen Ji. My way of handling it caused the Crown Prince to push me away. This time, I cannot make a move. Since he is Great Tang's Crown Prince, he has to learn how to distinguish between the people by his side. He has to learn to deal with adversity. Even if he falls, he must bravely stand up and continue forward."

Chief Cao was respectful. "Your Majesty is brilliant."

In winter, the weather was exceptionally cool and dreary. Concubine Yan was wearing a red fox fur coat as she stood in the garden. She looked in the direction of Ganluo Palace and Lizheng Palace.

She was smiling. "Did they think that a few family banquets could resolve all their internal conflict? The Empress has been ill for a while and is no longer thinking clearly. How can a few drops of water put out a prairie fire? Power is the best firewood in the world."

"The conflict between the Crown Prince and Prince Han has always been suppressed by the Empress. Now, with what You Jianming said in court, these resentment that has been forcefully suppressed will surge forth. The Empress will not be able to control it." Beside her, there was always a shadow known as 'Yu He'.

"I am very curious. How did Yan Zifang get You Jianming to promise to take this risk?" Concubine Yan asked.

"Yan Zifang only manages the West City now, but his reach is all over Chang'an. On the surface, You Jianming seems like an upright official and an Iron Mask Imperial Censor. However, unbeknownst to his family, he actually keeps a mistress. This mistress even gave birth to his son. When Yan Zifang found out, he got hold of his weakness. As

Your Highness knows, Yan Zifang used to be a pirate. Threatening people, along with blackmailing, is second nature to him. Moreover, he knows how to use both carrots and stick. With a little trickery, how can You Jianming stand up to him? If exposed, not only will You Jianming's reputation be ruined, he might also die a horrible death."

"Speaking of which, it is all thanks to Fu Shui that we could get Yan Zifang on our side." Concubine Yan stopped staring and smiled freely. "I asked you to send the gift. Did you see Fu Shui? Is he well? When he was young, you already entered the palace and you both hardly got to see each other. If there is a chance in the future, I will get him to accompany you so that you can enjoy some family love." Concubine Yan seemed to make him a promise.

Yu He's smile deepened. "Hopefully, that day will come."

"It definitely will." Concubine Yan headed towards her palace. "The Crown Prince is fortunate. Every time something happens to him, there is always someone that steps out to protect him. The Grand Emperor and the Emperor both did the same. However, this blessing of his will come to an end. I heard that the Empress coughed out blood?"

Yu He replied, "Yes. Recently, she has not left Lizheng Palace."

"This reminds me. I should drink some ginseng soup." Concubine Yan entered her palace.

Princess Xinnan decided that no matter what, she was going to talk to her elder brother, the Crown Prince, about her and Sheng Chuling today. She wanted him to help her speak up in front of Imperial Father and Imperial Mother. When she reached the Eastern Palace, Sun Lingshu told her that the Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang were at the military drill ground. She then asked to carry Xiang'er to find the Crown Prince together. Sun Lingshu knew that she loved children and did not stop her.

When Xinnan reached the military drill ground, she did not see the Crown Prince but saw Sheng Chuling tied to a pole. He was currently

being lashed at. The Crown Prince was feeling depressed. Fu Shui influenced him to find Grand Prince Liang. Grand Prince Liang then suggested that their guards formed two separate teams and fought on horsebacks like what the foreigners did. Sheng Chuling had no choice but to participate. However, because Grand Prince Liang's guards were barbaric, his fellow guards were severely injured and some were in critical condition. Therefore, he rebelled. At that time, the Crown Prince was recovering from his drinks. Grand Prince Liang heard Fu Shui say that this lad was Sheng Chumu's younger brother and took the chance.

"Stop it!" Xinnan did not know that this was a deliberate attempt to get back at the Duke Lu Residence as she rushed in front of Sheng Chuling.

Grand Prince Liang instructed for the people carrying out the punishment to stop. He stepped forward and smiled. "Xinnan, why have you come?"

Xinnan was fuming. "Why are you hitting him?"

"This brat was disrespectful to me..." Grand Prince Liang found it strange. "Eh, what has me hitting him got to do with you?"

Xinnan shouted, "You are too much! Let him down now!"

Grand Prince Liang's face fell. "Xinnan, is that how you talk to your uncle? No respect."

Xinnan snorted, "You are a drunkard and lecherous. How dare you act like an uncle in front of me? I haven't sorted it out with you for hitting him like this!" She glared angrily at the guards on both sides. "Aren't you going to let him down quickly?"

"Who dares to?" Grand Prince Liang blew up. "Sheng Chuling did not listen to orders and disobeyed me. It is only proper that I punish him. Men, continue hitting him. Hit him until he begs for mercy."

"Who dares?" Xinnan spread her hands out like a mother hen protecting her chick.

The Crown Prince returned and frowned when he saw what was

happening. “What is going on?”

Xinnan thought her saviour had arrived. “Brother Crown Prince! Grand Prince Liang is hitting people for no reason. Brother Crown Prince, hurry and help me!”

Grand Prince Liang spoke, “Crown Prince, you are the one that said I could use these guards. Sheng Chuling did not listen to me and rebelled in front of me. Tell me, should I punish him?”

The Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang were close. Moreover, he wanted to set an example and use Sheng Chuling to punish Duke Lu Residence to hurt Prince Han.

He naturally said, “Of course you cannot let such an arrogant and rude brat go so easily.”

Xinnan shouted, “Brother Crown Prince!”

The Crown Prince was strict. “Xinnan, he is just a guard that should be punished. Why are you protecting him? Let’s hand him over to Grand Prince Liang to handle.”

“Since the Crown Prince is letting me deal with this, then I won’t stand on courtesy.” Grand Prince Liang gestured to his guards. “Continue hitting him.”

Xinnan was fuming. She pushed and hit the guards that lifted the whip. The guards did not dare to resist.

“Let me do it!” Grand Prince Liang snatched the whip over and lashed out fiercely at Sheng Chuling.

Xinnan pounced over and hugged Sheng Chuling. “You are going to hit him? Hit him if you dare! Grand Emperor is dead. If you dare to hit me, let’s see how Imperial Father deals with you!”

Grand Prince Liang was fuming. “Very good! Other people look down on me. Now even you, a junior is looking down on me? I am your uncle. Do you think I do not dare to hit you?” He swung the whip and hit them both together.

As the Crown Prince saw Xinnan get hit, he wanted to ask Grand Prince Liang to stop. Fu Shui muttered beside him, "The sword that you borrowed has just been lifted. If Your Highness speaks up now, this sword will have to be placed down once again and all your efforts will be wasted."

The Crown Prince did not make a sound.

Sun Lingshu noticed that Xinnan did not return and came over to take a look. She saw that Grand Prince Liang was hitting Xinnan and Sheng Chuling. She was extremely shocked. She quickly walked up to the Crown Prince. "Your Highness, this..."

The Crown Prince was cold. "It is none of our business."

Sigh. Xinnan wanted the Crown Prince to help her get together with Chuling too... -_-

Court Lady

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Sheng Chuling saw that Grand Prince Liang was showing no mercy and hitting Xinnan hard. He was anxious for her to let go. However, she hugged on to him tightly, not wanting to let go.

"I think I see it now. So you are an illicit couple." Grand Prince Liang was laughing. "Xinnan, don't blame me for not showing mercy if you hug another man without a care for your reputation!"

Sheng Chuling had wanted to just take the punishment, but now Xinnan was implicated. Grand Prince Liang was not holding back as he hit them. All of a sudden, the rope that was binding him tore. Sheng Chuling kicked Grand Prince Liang and snatched a sword from the guard beside him. He pulled Xinnan behind him. Sheng Chuling shouted, "Don't come over! If not I will really kill!"

Fu Shui suddenly hollered, "Sheng Chuling is kidnapping Princess Xinnan!"

The Crown Prince immediately realised this and instructed, "Sheng Chuling is kidnapping the Princess. His behaviour is inappropriate. Everyone, punish him!"

Grand Prince Liang grew excited. "Kill him! Let's go!"

The guards surrounded them. Sheng Chuling pushed Xinnan away. "They want to kill me. Stay away from me."

Xinnan did not budge. "Do you still remember the peace knot you made for me? Let's stay safe together or die together!"

Sheng Chuling wanted to push Xinnan out but as he saw the various swords pointed at them, he quickly pulled Xinnan towards him as he used his back to block a sword.

"Stop right there!" Empress Zhangsun's furious voice sounded. Xinnan stumbled as she hugged Empress Zhangsun's leg. "Imperial Mother! Save me!"

Empress Zhangsun saw the bloody scars all over Xinnan and shouted, "What is going on?"

The Crown Prince remained expressionless. "Sheng Chuling kidnapped Xinnan. I was afraid Xinnan would get injured so I instructed the guards to surround Sheng Chuling."

Xinnan argued angrily, "The Crown Prince is lying! Imperial Mother, they were hitting Sheng Chuling. I thought that it was unreasonable and wanted to stop them but Grand Prince Liang hit me as well. Sheng Chuling rebelled in order to protect me."

Zhangsun's gaze landed on Grand Prince Liang. "Grand Prince Liang, what do you have to say?"

Grand Prince Liang was unperturbed. "Sister-in-law, how would I have known that Xinnan has an illicit affair with a guard? She saw that Sheng Chuling was getting hit and turned into a crazy woman. She scolded me and the Crown Prince. Everyone here saw it. She did not care about honour. Everyone here can be witnesses, she was the one that jumped on Sheng Chuling and took the hits for him. As an uncle, I was furious and hit her twice to teach her a lesson."

Xinnan was speechless. "Grand Prince Liang, you!"

"Did I wrong you?" Grand Prince Liang pursed his lips. "Do you dare to swear to your ancestors that you don't have anything to do with Sheng Chuling? If you can, I will take off my clothes and let you hit me back for just now."

Empress Zhangsun bellowed, "That's enough! The princess has

suffered a shock. Hurry and help the Princess.”

Xinnan wanted to continue speaking. However, she saw Empress Zhangsun’s stern look and could only obediently allow the palace maids to help her back.

“Sheng Chuling is a guard of the Eastern Palace. Why did you tie him up and hit him?” Empress Zhangsun did not forget to find out what happened.

Grand Prince Liang replied, “He did not listen to orders and looked down on the Imperial family. He was extremely hateful therefore...”

Empress Zhangsun cut him off, “I am asking the Crown Prince.”

The Crown Prince was cold. “In order to ease my feelings of melancholy, I invited Grand Prince Liang. I promised to let him use the Eastern Palace’s guards. Sheng Chuling disobeyed Grand Prince Liang’s orders. That means he disobeyed me and should be punished.”

Sheng Chuling bore the pain as he walked forward and kneeled. “Your Majesty, in order to entertain himself, Grand Prince Liang ordered us to take off our armour. He then made us ride horses and fight his guards with bamboo spears. The bamboo spears were sharp and several guards were injured. We entered the Imperial army to protect the Imperial family and the city, not to become toys that fight against one another for someone else’s entertainment.”

The Crown Prince was fierce. “As an Imperial Guard, you did not listen to orders and have committed a grave sin. It does not matter what excuse you give.”

Fu Rou spoke up, “Your Majesty, Sheng Chuling did not do anything wrong. Confucius has taught this and he said if a leader is a good role model, even without orders, his followers will know what to do. However, if the leader is not proper, even with orders, his followers will not obey. Grand Prince Liang is not proper and ordered Sheng Chuling to do something that is barbaric and has no justification. It is completely understandable that Sheng Chuling does not want to obey.”

Empress Zhangsun nodded, agreeing with her. She ordered for someone to help Sheng Chuling to the Imperial Physician Office. She then turned to Grand Prince Liang. "Grand Prince Liang, return to your residence. You are to remain there and reflect for three days. If not, I will report this to His Majesty and let His Majesty make a decision."

Grand Prince Liang left dejectedly.

"Crown Prince, just what are you trying to do?" Empress Zhangsun was disappointed and heartbroken.

"What am I trying to do?" The Crown Prince was extremely stubborn. "I want to be a good Crown Prince but my leg is disabled. During court, an official said that I should give up my position to Prince Han. I could not do anything to them. At Lizheng Palace, Imperial Mother said that it was not Prince Han's fault so I could not do anything to Prince Han. I can only remain in my Eastern Palace and find a way to entertain myself with Grand Prince Liang. I never thought that a guard would disobey an order and create such a huge commotion. Now, I cannot even handle a guard in my own Eastern Palace. A disabled Crown Prince is so worthless and is bullied by everyone. If you have no other instructions for me, my leg has been causing me pain. Forgive me for being disrespectful and taking my leave first."

Without waiting for Empress Zhangsun to speak, the Crown Prince turned and left.

Sun Lingshu wanted to chase after the Crown Prince but Empress Zhangsun called her to stay. "Crown Princess, when Xinnan was getting hit, were you present?"

Sun Lingshu was frightened. "I...I wanted to persuade him but..."

"Were you present?" Empress Zhangsun's face remained stern.

Sun Lingshu had no choice but to tell the truth. "...Yes."

Zhangsun's tone was sharp. "You are the Crown Princess. When you see that he is doing something absurd, you should persuade and stop him. However, you did not do your duty as a wife. When the Crown

Prince was interacting with Chen Ji, you and your father brought it up to the Emperor and caused the Crown Prince to fall out of favour with His Majesty. When the Crown Prince fell out with his brother, Prince Han, not only did you not try to mend their relationship, on the contrary, you kept targeting Consort Han. You even complained to the Crown Prince and made things worse to the point that it could not be taken back. Today, Xinnan was hit. As her sister-in-law, you simply watched and did not do anything, causing her to be full of injuries. Ever since the Crown Prince married you, the Eastern Palace has been filled with troubles.”

Sun Lingshu flinched. “I am useless.”

“You are not useless, you are guilty. You are impatient, jealous, foolish and selfish. How can someone like you be worthy of the position of Crown Princess? How can you be the female master of the Eastern Palace? Today, if I want to dispose of you and chase you out of the Eastern Palace, it will only take a single sentence! Don’t think that just because you married into the Eastern Palace, your position as Crown Princess is stable. From now on, you better act cautiously and follow the rules. If you dare to instigate the Crown Prince to disregard his brotherhood with Prince Han, or intentionally fight against Consort Han, I will make you become the world’s biggest disgrace and throw you back to the Sun family.” Empress Zhangsun’s expression was icy as she turned and walked away.

Sun Lingshu fell to the ground. After a long while, Shuangxi helped her to stand.

A stony look flashed through her eyes. “Ever since I entered the Eastern Palace, I have not had a peaceful day. I have always been struggling. I finally managed to give birth to Xiang’er and the Crown Prince started to treat me better. But what did she say? She is going to make me return to the Sun Residence as the world’s biggest disgrace?”

Shuangxi was worried. “It will not happen. Her Majesty was just...”

“Scaring me?” Sun Lingshu shook her head. “The Crown Princess position looks glorious but it is actually the most pitiful position in the palace. The Emperor, his concubines, the Crown Prince, the

princes and even Consort Han who married into the family first can step over me. But why do I have to suffer this grievance?"

Shuangxi did not dare to respond.

"Go. Check who was the one that reported to Imperial Mother. If it was someone that Consort Han had secretly placed here from before, there is no need to report to me. Kill them." Sun Lingshu slowly started walking. "I have managed to survive until today. I will continue to press on. I will survive until the day the Crown Prince inherits the throne. I don't believe that I cannot even deal with Consort Han!"

Both the Crown Prince and Crown Princess have the victim mentality. Be prepared for more drama...

Court Lady

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Fu Rou entered Princess Xinnan's palace. Princess Xinnan was sitting by the window in a daze with a helpless expression on her face. She went up to her and greeted.

"Fu Siyan, have you seen Chuling? Is he severely injured?" Princess Xinnan was most worried about Sheng Chuling.

Fu Rou spoke blandly, "Sheng Chuling is being taken care of by the Duke Lu Residence. I don't have time to see him nor do I have to see him."

Xinnan recalled that Fu Rou and Sheng Chumu had nothing to do with each other anymore. However, she felt that there was no need for Fu Rou to rush to draw such a clear line. Xinnan could not control her tone and asked her what she came here for.

Fu Rou replied, "Her Majesty requests for you to go to Lizheng Palace."

"Imperial Mother wants to see me?" Xinnan seemed stunned as she could not help but curl up. "I...I don't want to go..."

Fu Rou's expression remained unchanged. "Your Highness, are you trying to anger Her Majesty? Today, the issue with the Eastern Palace has already caused her to be angry. She is not well to begin with and now, her health is worsening. Your Highness should not go against

Her Majesty and go to Lizheng Palace quickly.”

“But Imperial Mother must be furious. I am afraid...what should I do? Fu Siyan, you have to save me!” She had nowhere to go and only Fu Rou had a lot of ideas. “Even if your relationship with Sheng Chumu is not good and you are not Sheng Chuling’s sister-in-law, I have treated you well. You can’t watch me die and not save me. Moreover, if the both of you can’t become a couple, shouldn’t you at least let the both of us have some hope?”

Fu Rou did not know whether to laugh or cry. “I can only give you one suggestion. All parents will soften towards their children. When you meet Her Majesty, you just have to do two things. The first will be to apologise for your mistake. The second is to cry.”

Not only did Xinnan cry, her tears fell like a downpour.

Empress Zhangsun rubbed her eyebrows. “Don’t cry. I haven’t said anything and you are already crying like this.”

“It is my fault. I did not follow the rules and liked Sheng Chuling. It is entirely my fault. I have disappointed you and made you sad. Even if I were to be beaten to death by Grand Prince Liang, it will not be enough to make up for my wrongdoings.” Xinnan lifted her hand to wipe her tears. Her sleeve rolled backwards, exposing the numerous scars.

Empress Zhangsun felt her heart ache. “Why didn’t you apply any medicine?”

Fu Rou replied on her behalf, “Her Highness said that she has made a mistake and should be punished. She is not willing to use medicine.”

Empress Zhangsun was angry. “Ridiculous! Your body is given to you by your parents. Any injury you have will hurt me.” She instructed the internal attendant to quickly call for an imperial physician.”

“Imperial Mother.” Xinnan kneeled by Empress Zhangsun’s foot. “There is no need to call for an imperial physician. I have humiliated you as well as the Royal family. What is the point of living for a criminal like me? I am willing to die to erase the humiliation that I

have brought to you and Imperial Father. Please grant me poison wine or...or a white silk.”

“Your relationship with an Eastern Palace guard...is indeed wrong. However, no matter how angry I am, there is no need for you to kill yourself. How did you come up with such a foolish idea?” After all, her daughter had reached the marriage age. Moreover, her previous two marriage engagements had failed. Empress Zhangsun sympathised with Xinnan.

“But with what happened with Eastern Palace, everyone will know about my situation with Sheng Chuling. My reputation has been ruined. If Imperial Father knows about this, he will be furious and make me become a nun. I will have to remain single and only have the buddha statue as accompaniment for the rest of my life. I would rather die.”

“Amongst all his daughters, your Imperial Father dotes on you the most. He will not be so cruel.” Empress Zhangsun had initially summoned her daughter to lecture her but ended up trying to comfort her.

Xinnan continued to talk about how miserable her life was as she cried out loud. “Even if I don’t have to shave my head and become a nun, the best scenario would be that he arranged a marriage for me with a random man. If my future husband’s family knows that I had a relationship with Sheng Chuling before, how can they accept me? I will be scolded by my mother-in-law and ignored by my husband. I am afraid that I cannot escape this. I have made a serious mistake and I thoroughly regret it. Imperial Mother, you should just give me a harsh punishment. I am willing to accept it.”

“Punishment is to make someone change. You already know your mistake, why would I need to punish you?”

After catching several looks from Xinnan, Fu Rou finally said, “Your Majesty, what is important now is to arrange Her Highness’ future. There are many people in the Eastern Palace and they will talk. If this spreads, Her Highness’ reputation will not be salvageable. We should turn this situation into a good one.”

“Turning a bad situation into a good one...” Empress Zhangsun immediately understood. “You mean granting marriage between...”

Fu Rou took over. “Only in this manner, can the situation between Princess Xinnan and Sheng Chuling become positive. Her Highness will not need to bear with a bad reputation and can even have a new home. The Royal family’s reputation will not be ruined.”

Empress Zhangsun shook her head. “No.”

Princess Xinnan became anxious and wanted to speak. However, she saw Fu Rou’s gesture and could only cry more bitterly.

Fu Rou replied, “Sheng Chuling is just an imperial guard. His status is indeed a little too low and is not suitable to marry the princess.”

Empress Zhangsun explained, “It does not matter if his status is low, he can just be promoted a few times. His father is Duke Lu so his family background is good enough. However, Prince Han said before that Sheng Chuling likes to drink and he will abuse people when he is drunk. If Princess Xinnan marries him, won’t she be abused?”

Fu Rou came up with a good idea. “This is easy. Your Majesty just has to set a decree that Sheng Chuling is not allowed to drink from now on.”

Empress Zhangsun fell silent for a moment. “This person is so bold. He actually dares to like my daughter. Now because of Xinnan, I cannot punish him. From now on, he shall not be allowed to drink anymore. This shall be his punishment.”

Princess Xinnan’s mouth opened. Under Fu Rou’s gaze, she changed it back to a crying face. “Imperial Mother, I don’t want to marry. I can’t bear to leave you.”

Empress Zhangsun sighed, “If you can’t bear to leave me, why did you make such a mistake? Now that you have done it, you have to bear with the consequences. You have to marry Sheng Chuling and protect your reputation as well as the Royal family’s. There is no need to discuss this further. I will bring this matter up to your Imperial Father. Xinnan, you should be prepared to get married.”

Princess Xinnan hugged Empress Zhangsun's leg as she cried out loud.

Fu Rou saw everything clearly. It was like thunder without rain. All that was missing was a proud smile. *This proud princess had finally gone through the tough times. Good times were just beginning.* It made her envious.

Consort Han was helping Prince Han prepare his luggage. She could not help but sigh. Empress Zhangsun had ordered him to go to Fengtian Monastery to pray on her behalf. However, the truth was that she just wanted him to go until the Crown Prince had calmed down.

"Consort, don't be like this. I already can't bear to leave you. If you are so upset, I will feel even worse." Prince Han could not bear to see his beloved wife upset. "Come and smile for me."

Consort Han rolled her eyes. "You are so dumb. You do whatever your mother says, don't you know how to stand up for yourself? You Jianming did things on his own accord. The fact that the Crown Prince blames you for it is already ridiculous."

Prince Han replied, "Imperial Mother knows this as well. However, at this point in time, the Crown Prince will not listen to anything and will think that Imperial Mother is biased and trying to help me. Actually, Imperial Mother takes pretty good care of us. She did not say anything about your wrong diagnosis and only told me to take care of you."

Consort Han laughed bitterly, "If only it were so simple. I am afraid people don't know your good intentions."

Anyway, she had no more expectations for the Crown Prince and Crown Princess. *Perhaps anybody that sits in that position will always be suspicious. She was thankful that she had married Prince Han.*

"I heard that in the mountain behind Fengtian Monastery, there is a flower called Purple-dress Goddess. I heard that it is extremely

beautiful. When I reach there, I will pick all the flowers back for you. During the Lantern Festival, you can have a whole head of flowers and wear the newest dress from Belle Shop to see the festival. Everyone in Chang'an will be attracted to you."

Consort Han's bitter smile changed into a humorous laugh. "A whole head of flowers. I would look like a crazy woman."

Prince Han was happy. "You smiled! You smiled! It is good as long as you smile!"

"Your Highness, let's not try to fight or snatch for anything. After you return, let's ask Imperial Father and Mother for a piece of land. We shall leave this place and have a simple and peaceful life. Won't that be great?"

The family banquet could not mend the brothers' relationship. In the end, they had to face the truth. Consort Han finally understood.

"Okay!" Prince Han also felt that staying in Chang'an was no longer easy. "As long as you are with me, anywhere is good! Oh right, Imperial Mother also said that as long as we have anything good, we have to remember to share it with Eastern Palace. When I am not around, you have to remember. After all, as long as we are still here, making the Crown Prince feel good means making Imperial Mother happy. We should be filial. Didn't you make some jujube cake? It is rare that it is actually eatable..."

Consort Han glared at him.

Prince Han immediately changed his words. "It is the best. It is comparable to the ones made by the Imperial Kitchen. I told Imperial Mother that you would give some to the Eastern Palace. Don't forget."

Consort Han smiled. "Yes."

After Prince Han left, snow fell heavily for the entire night. Winter had arrived.

lol Xinnan is so dramatic and Prince Han is so cute.

Court Lady

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Snow was still falling.

Sun Lingshu stood in the snow as she gazed distractedly at the figure that was leaving. It was her younger sister, Sun Lingwei. Lingwei had come into the palace today to beg her not to marry her off to Lu Qi. Sun Lingshu asked her if she had someone she liked. Lingwei had replied that she did not. However, a peace knot had fallen out of her sleeve. When Sun Lingshu picked it up to look, Lingwei became nervous and said that it was very important.

Sun Lingshu, however, recalled that Princess Xinnan had a similar peace knot. She also treated it like a gem. Sun Lingshu immediately thought of Princess Xinnan and Sheng Chuling. Sun Lingshu found an opportunity to ask Lingwei's servant, Guiyuan. Guiyuan was honest and said that recently, Sun Lingwei was very close to Duke Lu Residence's Third Young Master.

How can it be? How can it be? Her sister, who she doted on, was actually secretly dating Consort Han's younger brother! In this palace, there was the Empress that was biased to Prince Han, Xinnan who was biased to Consort Han. There was also Fu Rou, who was always helping Duke Lu Residence. Could it be that her life was not difficult enough? Was Consort Han's hand going to reach into her maiden family?

Sun Lingshu suddenly walked into the main hall. She felt lonely.

A palace maid walked in holding a tray of snacks. She said that they were jujube cakes sent from Han Mansion.

Sun Lingshu immediately felt disgusted as she shouted, “Throw them away! In the future, throw away anything that comes from the Han Mansion!”

Fu Shui walked in. He took the tray from the palace maid and gestured for the palace maid to leave. “Your Highness seems troubled. Throwing everything from the Han Mansion away will only make you feel better. However, by doing so, you will not be able to help His Highness.”

“Fu Shui, have you ever experienced this feeling? In the past, you had so many people around you that were concerned and cared about you. But all of a sudden, you realised that all these are lies. Everyone is lying to you, even your sister, who you loved and trusted the most, has betrayed you. She looks at you with innocent eyes and lies to your face. It makes you feel isolated, helpless and despair.”

“Ever since I was born, I led a life that was different from others. I never enjoyed peace. Nor have I ever enjoyed a family’s warmth. The sensation that I am most familiar with is this isolation that you just described. However, I have never felt despair.”

Sun Lingshu asked, “How do you do it?”

Fu Shui said a single word. “Fight.”

Sun Lingshu did not understand. “Fight?”

“Fight with those that look down on me or lie to me. Fight with those that humiliate me or want to hurt me. I fight with whoever that looks at me as an enemy. Life is basically a competition between life and death. I only think about how to win and don’t have time to despair.” Fu Shui looked sternly at Sun Lingshu. “Your Highness, do you think this feeling is despair? You are wrong. One day, if the Crown Prince gets disposed of and Prince Han becomes Great Tang’s Crown Prince, both of you will lose your status and respect. You will lose your comfortable life and live your life in mud. Everyday, you will worry about the final blade that will come and end you. At that time, you

will know what true despair is. If you don't want to end up like that, you have to be strong and help the Crown Prince in his fight against Han Mansion."

Sun Lingshu muttered, "Help the Crown Prince fight against Han Mansion?"

Fu Shui's words were like a curse. "Yes. Fight fiercely even if it means using unscrupulous means. Han Mansion is fierce but you have to be fiercer than them. If Prince Han is cruel, you have to be more cruel than him. Between the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion, it is either the Han Mansion that will perish or the Eastern Palace."

At this moment, Shuangxi ran in anxiously. "Crown Princess, something has gone wrong! Fu Siyan took the Imperial Grandson to Lizheng Palace."

Sun Lingshu jumped up and rushed out. Fu Shui stopped her. "Your Highness, where are you going?"

Sun Lingshu shouted, "They are snatching my Xiang'er. I want to go to Lizheng Palace to get my child back."

Fu Shui was cold. "If you go, will you be able to get him back? You will only anger Her Majesty and give her an excuse to send you back to the Sun Residence. Don't forget that Fu Siyan came from the Han Mansion. Han Mansion's plan is very thorough and they have already forced you step by step. Today, you lose your child. What will you lose tomorrow?"

Sun Lingshu's hands balled up into fists. Her entire body was trembling. Her gaze was penetrating as she glared at the plate of jujube cake.

After the snowy day, the weather was clear. The icicles that had formed under the roof edge had yet to melt. Fu Yin carried a basket of coal as she headed into the cabin. Her child's clothes could not be brought out to dry and she could only dry them by the furnace.

Although Lu Qi no longer cared about her and the servants spoke ill

of her, Housekeeper Wu did not slack off. However, she needed to do things herself. Ever since she entered the Lu Residence, she had done all kinds of labour. She had long stepped out of the comfortable life that she once led. Therefore, she did not feel as if she was suffering.

As she returned to the corridor outside the room. She lit up a charcoal and threw it into the furnace. She hung all the small shirts and pants before breathing out. She turned around only to see Lu Qi standing by the door and carrying their child. She did not know how long he had been watching her.

Lu Qi placed the child back into the cradle and walked out. He turned the corner of the corridor before stopping and walking back to the door.

He spoke, "I am going to get married. His Majesty has bestowed a marriage."

"I know. She is the Sun family's second daughter, the Crown Princess' sister." Everyone in the residence was talking about it.

He waited for her to say something. Unexpectedly, she remained quiet. *Like this! It was always like this! In the past, he had thought that she spoke very little because she was shy. Now he knew that it was because she had a lot of things on her mind.*

He grew angrier and he eventually burst out. "You said that since the first day you met me I was a cruel and heartless murderer?"

She did not deny. "Yes. I said that before."

"You said that when you first knew you were pregnant, you did not want to keep our child!" *Everyone said that if you love someone, you loved everything about them. However, because of him, his child was despised by his mother.*

"That's right. I said that before." It was not that she was speaking irresponsible. She was being honest.

"You!" His expression was filled with pain. "I thought that I had found the woman that most deserves my love and protection. In the end, she only thought of me as a murderer. Ever since you said that,

you have shattered my heart completely and I thought of killing you. No one has ever hurt or humiliated me like that before. I really want to kill you.”

“Then do it.” *If death was what awaits her, she was willing to accept it.*

“Don’t think that I won’t do it.” He tried his best to be emotionless.

“Lu Qi, I am useless. I once wanted to be a filial daughter to my parents but I did a horrible job. When my mother was still alive, I did not know how to cherish her and often made her angry. I wanted to do things that would allow my mother to be at peace in the afterlife but I didn’t do it well. Instead, I fell deeper and deeper to the point that I cannot be saved. I wanted to be a clean and innocent person but I killed Lu Hanxing. I became a murderer. I wanted to split my gratitude and grudges properly and repay them but I am hesitant and always sway, just like grass on a wall. Eventually, I decided not to do anything. If I just close my eyes, I could devote myself to being your woman and the mother of your child...but I ruined it.” She truly did not know what to do anymore.

“Not only do you hate me, I hate myself too. I am so useless and have nothing to show. If I remain alive, I will only hurt people. I would be better off dead. Hence, if you want to kill me, please do it.” *Look at her. Even now, she could not hold back her tears.* She wiped her tears roughly.

“I said and did many wrong things. I don’t know how to make up for it. I really want to go back to the past and return to when I have not done anything wrong.” *She would be Du Ning’s obedient wife. They would write and paint together, leading a peaceful life.*

Lu Qi suddenly came into the room and embraced Fu Yin tightly. “Don’t cry. Do you know that I can’t bear to see you cry? Don’t be afraid. Everyone makes mistakes. Forget about the past. We can start again.”

Fu Yin looked up. “Will you forgive me?”

Lu Qi nodded strongly. “Of course. Will you?” He looked into her eyes. *They were filled with sorrow yet they were pure. Maybe he did not*

know her before, but he knew that she was kind. He had never misjudged her on this.

Fu Yin nodded firmly. “Yes. I will learn from my mistakes and change. Let’s let our child’s childhood name be Shan’er [\[1\]](#). Shall we?”

Lu Qi smiled. “Very well.”

1. Shan 善 means to be kind/virtuous

Aaaaiiii be prepared for a lot of drama!!

Court Lady

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On this night, Sheng Chujun entered the Sun Residence using his familiar route. He jumped into Sun Lingwei's room through the window. "I have good news..." The both of them spoke simultaneously.

Sun Lingwei replied, "You can speak first."

Sheng Chujun smiled widely. "I have resolved Second Brother's marriage and my mother has promised to let me marry you." He had actually tricked them. He took the chance when his mother and brother were over the moon.

Sun Lingwei laughed shyly, "My family's problem is also about to be resolved soon. Elder Sister promised to help me."

"The Crown Princess really promised to help?" Sheng Chujun had heard too many of the Crown Princess' 'past achievements' and did not expect her to be any nicer to Lingwei.

"Elder Sister is the Empress' daughter-in-law and she even gave birth to the Imperial Grandson. If she talks to the Empress, she can definitely make the Empress' change her mind and not force me to marry Lu Qi. I told you that my Elder Sister dotes on me. As long as I ask her, she will definitely help me. Ever since young, she would always leave me something delicious to eat or nice things to play with. She is still the same although she has entered the Eastern

Palace. Look at the jujube cakes on the table. She asked Guiyuan to deliver it to me.”

“I never thought that the Crown Princess would have a soft side.” Sheng Chujun trusted Lingwei. “Seeing how Eastern Palace treats Elder Brother, I thought that the Crown Princess was evil.”

“You are not allowed to talk bad about my sister.” Lingwei trusted her elder sister.

“Fine, I will not say anything. As a couple, we are the same. Your sister is my sister.” *Ever since he met Lingwei, he had no more backbone.*

“Who is a couple with you? We have not gotten married.” Lingwei stated as she blushed.

“It doesn’t matter if we haven’t gotten married. After all, we are already secretly fooling around. Simply put, we are an adulterous couple.” Sheng Chujun did not filter his words and his skin was so thick that he did not know how to.

Sun Lingwei covered her face. “The way you speak is horrible. I am so embarrassed.”

Sheng Chujun reached out for her hands. “Embarrassed? Let me see your small face. Is it red?”

As the two of them laughed, Madam Sun’s voice could be heard from outside. Sheng Chujun quickly jumped out of the window.

Sun Lingwei grabbed onto Madam Sun’s hand, causing her back to face the window. “Mother, why have you come?”

Madam Sun replied, “I saw that your room was still lit and came over to have a look. It is already quite late, why aren’t you sleeping?”

“Mmhm...I was going to sleep but I suddenly...felt hungry. Therefore...” Sun Lingwei looked at Sheng Chujun hop onto the roof as she picked up a jujube cake.

Madam Sun shook her head. “Child, you are already going to be married yet you are still such a glutton.”

"But I am hungry. Mother, these jujube cakes are very nice. Do you want to try one?" Sun Lingwei finished one in a few bites.

"I am like your sister. We both don't like jujube cakes. Okay, sleep after you are done eating." Madam Sun patted her daughter lovingly and walked out.

Sun Lingwei closed the door as she picked up another jujube cake. She smiled. "Jujube jujube, sour and sweet, blessed with a child. If me and Sheng Chujun were to get married, how many children should we have? If I have a child for every jujube cake I eat..." She picked up another piece with a joyful expression on her face. She was a picture of bliss.

Sun Lingwei was dead! After eating the jujube cake, she started bleeding from her eyes, nose, ears and mouth!

When Fu Rou heard this news, her eyes jugged out. She felt as if the sky above the Royal Palace had changed. She rushed to Lizheng Palace only to hear the Crown Prince and Crown Princess begging Empress Zhangsun to seek justice for them.

"I am here to ask you to grant me death! A person's body is given to them by their parents. Since you gave it to me, you should take it back. It is better than being poisoned by my own brother!" The Crown Prince immediately pinned the crime on Prince Han.

"Imperial Mother! Lingwei...she died on our behalf! That plate of jujube cake was not meant for her. It was sent by Prince Han for the Eastern Palace!" The Crown Princess' face was pale as she had already put on mourning clothes for her younger sister.

"Crown Princess, don't talk nonsense. Prince Han will never do something like this." Empress Zhangsun strained to say. "The Investigation Bureau has already started investigating..."

The Crown Prince was hurt. "It is so clear yet you are still trying to help Prince Han! If I were to be poisoned to death, will you still be so indifferent? In your heart, do you have any sympathy for me? Okay,

okay...” He suddenly kowtowed three times.

“What are you trying to do?” Empress Zhangsun felt that something was wrong.

“Imperial Father is disappointed in me, Imperial Mother no longer loves me. My own brother cannot stand me. I have nowhere to go, I can only bid you farewell.” The Crown Prince took out the sword from his waist and placed it across his neck.

The Crown Princess cried out miserably, “Crown Prince!”

Empress Zhangsun’s expression changed. “Crown Prince, don’t!”

“When the Han Mansion hid poison under the horse saddle, Imperial Mother said that it was the people in the Han Mansion and Prince Han did not know anything about it. You did not allow me to pursue this matter with Prince Han. In the end, my leg is disabled and nothing happened to Prince Han. Now, the Han Mansion has sent a plate of poisoned jujube cake to the Eastern Palace, making their intentions abundantly clear. Yet Imperial Mother does not seem to care. I only want to ask you one thing. Do you really think that Prince Han is innocent?”

“The jujube cake was sent from the Han Mansion and they are indeed under suspicion. However--” *They still had to investigate further.*

The Crown Prince cut her off. “Then how do you intend to punish Prince Han?”

“Even if Han Mansion is suspicious, it might not have been Prince Han that ordered it.” Empress Zhangsun remained calm.

The Crown Prince chuckled coldly. The sword in his hand pressed against his neck. “If it is not Prince Han, then who else? Who else can it be!”

“It is not Prince Han, it is...is...” Empress Zhangsun’s heart sped up.

“It was Consort Han.” The Crown Princess’s tone was icy cold.

Fu Rou was extremely startled. *This was the true intention!*

Empress Zhangsun froze. In the next second, it was as if she had made up her mind. “Yes, it is Consort Han. Prince Han has already left Chang’an, the jujube cake can only be sent by Consort Han.” *If she had to choose between her son and her daughter-in-law to be the scapegoat, it would be her daughter-in-law!*

The Crown Princess remained expressionless. “Consort Han must have wanted Prince Han to become the Crown Prince. Therefore, she poisoned the jujube cake. Imperial Mother! Imperial Mother, you have to stand up for my poor sister! You have to punish Consort Han!”

The Crown Prince also added, “Imperial Mother, please punish Consort Han.”

“Your Majesty, the Investigation Bureau has yet to come to a conclusion. They have not finished investigating. You cannot immediately place the blame on Consort Han.” Fu Rou stepped up and knelt in determination. She never wavered between right and wrong.

“Fu Siyan is together with Consort Han. Now that Consort Han’s crime has been revealed, you are still pleading on her behalf? Could it be that you are involved in this too?” The Crown Princess criticised.

The Crown Prince continued threatening. “Imperial Mother, if you insist on protecting Han Mansion, then I will die here. After all, if I cannot gain your fairness, I will only be pushed to the edge by Han Mansion and will eventually die.”

Empress Zhangsun fell silent for a moment before slowly speaking, “If Consort Han used poison to kill, she should face the death penalty. But you have to understand that Consort Han is Consort Han while Prince Han is Prince Han. Your younger brother did not try to poison you.”

“Your Majesty!” Fu Rou was shocked. “If Consort Han is guilty, she should be dealt with according to Great Tang’s laws after the investigation is completed. If you deal out the death penalty for your own personal reasons, you will ruin Great Tang’s laws. Your

Majesty, please think again!”

“Imperial Mother is the head of the six departments and manages the royal family’s issues. Why is there a need for Great Tang’s laws? How dare you slander the Empress. Complete disrespect!” At this moment, the Crown Princess’ voice resounded even louder.

Empress Zhangsun’s expression was strict. “Guards, take Fu Siyan away. Lock her up in the Rites Office.”

“Your Majesty! Prince Han and Consort Han’s love is very deep. If you kill his wife, what will Prince Han do? How will you face Prince Han in the future? You definitely cannot!”

No matter how other people slandered her, Fu Rou had a clear conscience.

“Prince Han is filial. He will not go against his own mother for a lady that cannot give birth. Brothers are like hands while wives are like clothes. I rather burn the clothes than to chop off the hands! Drag her away! Take away her token to leave the palace!”

In Empress Zhangsun’s eyes, there was no Tang Law or National Law. She only had two sons.

It was then that Fu Rou realised that the priest’s deliberate words had formed a thorn in this Empress’ heart. Now, it had crept all over her heart. There was no way to remove it and it would eventually lead to a tragedy.

When I read this chapter, I was like...wtffffffffff... How can the Crown Princess poison her own sister?? And the Empress...

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Li Baolin was in the Imperial Garden's pavilion, enjoying the snowy scenery as she drank hot tea. She was extremely content. Recently, there had been a wave in the Lizheng Palace and the brothers from the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion had been fighting more and more fiercely. It was not as if she did not know this. She was celebrating that she was transparent and would not be swept up in the fight.

From afar, she saw a few internal attendants looking for something. She remained in silence as she drank her tea peacefully. All of a sudden, she heard movement from behind a fake mountain. Soon, someone stepped out.

Li Baolin also shrieked but quickly covered her mouth as soon as she recognised who that was. She spoke lowly, "Fu Rou, what trouble have you gotten yourself into this time?"

Fu Rou looked anxious. "It is hard to explain. I am rushing to Lingxiao Palace now to do something important."

"All the internal attendants are looking for you. Do you think you can reach Lingxiao Palace with what you are wearing?" Li Baolin glanced at the internal attendants in the distance. She instructed her palace maid. "Guihua, take off your clothes and give them to Fu Siyan."

Li Baolin then said to Fu Rou. "They are looking for a female official

and will not notice a palace maid. Those internal attendants are not flexible and are extremely stupid.”

Fu Rou smiled gratefully at her as she wore Guihua’s clothes. “I am leaving now, I will thank you another day.”

Li Baolin looked on as Fu Rou moved through the Imperial Garden and murmured to herself, “I hope you still have a chance to thank me.”

When Fu Rou reached Lingxiao Palace, she saw that the door was wide open. She spoke as she walked in. “Your Highness, please hurry and send a letter to Sheng Chumu and Prince Han...” When she saw who was in the study room, she was startled and immediately greeted. “Greetings, Concubine Yan.”

It seemed as if Concubine Yan had been waiting for her. Her expression was calm. “Fu Siyan, is there a need to ask another prince to send Prince Han a letter?”

Fu Rou could not be bothered to care about anything else. “The Empress wants to kill Consort Han. It is very urgent. Your Highness, please help to send someone out of the palace to inform Prince Han and Sheng Chumu. If not, it will be too late.”

Concubine Yan did not make a sound. Fu Rou was anxious. “Your Highness, if you help the Han Mansion this time, you will be a huge benefactor to the Han Mansion and the Duke Lu Residence. The situation in the palace can change anytime. Who does not need more friends to help? This will not only help Your Highness, but it can also help Prince Zhou’s future.” She has never wanted to use anybody. But if she did not put it this way, Consort Han will have no chance.

Concubine Yan finally nodded. “You make sense.”

Fu Rou relaxed slightly. “Then please hurry, Your Highness.”

Concubine Yan called for two internal attendants. Just when Fu Rou thought she had succeeded, the two internal attendants grabbed ahold of her.

“Take her away.” Concubine Yan smiled.

Fu Rou was shocked. “Your Highness?”

“Fu Siyan, you are a very reasonable person. However, in this palace, reason is not what matters. It is power. The Empress is the master of the rear palace, she can make any decision and we all have to listen to her. Since she has instructed the internal attendants to capture you, I have to obey.” She was more than happy to cooperate this time.

“Your Highness, if you do this, you are helping the Eastern Palace kill Consort Han! You will be colluding with them!” Fu Rou criticised her openly, not knowing that she had succeeded by a lucky stroke.

Concubine Yan refused to accept. “Her mother-in-law is the one that wants to kill her. I did not do anything. I am innocent.”

“You can’t do this!” Fu Rou did not give up her last bit of hope. “Where is Prince Zhou? I want to see Prince Zhou!”

Concubine Yan wanted to laugh. “I am not interfering, much less Prince Zhou.” She waved her hand and ordered Fu Rou to be dragged out.

Soon, Prince Zhou entered.

“Mother, why are you here?” He looked left and right. “I think I heard...” *Fu Rou’s voice?*

Concubine Yan stood up. “Of course I am waiting for you. Did you forget what day it is today?”

Prince Zhou suddenly looked slightly uncomfortable. “I did not forget. It is Grandfather’s death anniversary.”

Concubine Yan walked past Prince Zhou. “Let’s go. Accompany me to offer incense to your grandfather.”

Prince Zhou hesitated before turning to follow. *There were some things that he could not say. He read history books and knew that his grandfather was cruel and extravagant. His grandfather had brought the flourishing country built by his great-grandfather to ruins. In the end, he suffered the consequence of his own actions. His grandfather’s death*

anniversary was the citizens' holiday. How tragic. However, his mother was filial. On the surface, she built a temple but it was actually for her to offer joss sticks to his grandfather. On this day every year, he had to go to offer incense. He could not escape.

The snow had yet to melt completely. With a frosty look, Prince Han appeared in front of his residence. His robe was covered in mud as he rushed to get off his horse. He almost tripped over a step. The door men came to help him but was pushed away by him and they fell to the ground.

He looked up only to see a pale mourning lamp hung in front of the door. He roared, "What nonsense is this! Take them all down!"

Prince Han ran in as he passed the front hall. However, he saw the white silk hung all over the place. His eyes were red as he ran forward and pulled at it. He could not move it and he shouted. The housekeepers were stunned.

He bellowed, "Tear them down! Tear them all down! After I speak with my consort, if I still see these unlucky things, you all can get lost!" His eyes were like dried up cavities. No one dared to say anything.

Prince Han then stepped over the doorstep and walked into the main hall. In an instant, the black and white flowers as well as the black coffin filled his eyes. The sight was so piercing that he felt giddy. He could barely stand. His consort was lying in the coffin.

"Consort...consort.. don't play around." He stumbled in front of the coffin as he stared at her lifeless face.

He suddenly carried her out of the coffin and placed her sitting on the ground. He held her hand. "I have only gone for two days. Why didn't you take care of your body? You are cold. Even your hands are cold. Xiu'er, go and take a hand warmer to warm on her hands."

Xiu'er was crying. "Your Highness. Her Highness has...has passed away."

"Don't talk nonsense! I am back. Where can she go? Where are the beauty vitamins? Bring them over. I will personally feed them to consort. Look at my consort's face. Not eating vitamins for a single day makes her so pale."

Xiu'er cried out loud, "Your Highness, before Her Highness passed away, she said that being able to serve you was her greatest blessing. She wanted you to take care of yourself and live a happy and long life. She hopes that you will have many children and grandchildren."

Prince Han fell silent for a while before tears flowed out. He shouted at Xiu'er, "Stop talking nonsense. Go and get it!"

At this moment, another person rushed in. Sheng Chumu, who had taken a hundred troops to Cangshan Mountain for training, had yet to take off his armour. Like Prince Han, his face still showed the hardships of travelling.

Prince Han's eyes lit up. "Chumu, you came in time. Your sister is angry and is ignoring me. Help me to persuade her. I swear that I did not fool around with any other women on my trip. I didn't even look at them. Tell your sister not to be angry at me, I will apologise to her..."

Sheng Chumu pretended not to hear as his gaze was fixed on Consort Han for a long time. He took big strides forward before falling to his knees.

Although his sister had a fiery temper, she was very kind and took care of her three younger brothers. When he was being beaten by his father, she would always rush back home from the Han Mansion to plead on his behalf. When he suffered, his sister would cry for him. When he was at the borders, his sister would always send him big and small packs of food and clothes. Compared to his parents, he was more willing to share secrets with his elder sister. His elder sister would always support him unconditionally.

But such a good elder sister had actually been given poison wine by her mother-in-law! What a joke! She did not abide by Tang Laws nor National Laws. Nothing had been investigated. Just to maintain the relationship between the Crown Prince and Prince Han, she had killed his

innocent sister!

If it were a normal family, they could send her to court and deal with her for murder. But because this happened in the Royal family, his sister's death was silent. Her death would not even cause a ripple. Their family could only cry silently and bear with it. They could only suffer this grievance and not complain a single word.

But, he hated it!

Fu Rou hugged her knees as she sat in the corner. She looked at the sky through the steel bars. Suddenly, she felt as if someone had stopped outside her prison cell. She glanced over. It was Prince Zhou.

"Is Consort Han dead?" She asked even though she already knew the answer.

"Yes." Prince Zhou said blandly.

Tears flowed down her cheeks. "When I first came to Chang'an, she did not allow me to be together with Sheng Chumu. She forced me to be a seamstress in the Han Mansion. I once...hated her."

"You tried your best." Prince Zhou did not put in much effort to comfort her.

"If I had tried my best, she would still be alive. I did not try my best. I should have done better. I should have been smarter. It is because of this I failed to stop Her Majesty from making the wrong decision. In the end, I used my last chance on you and foolishly begged Concubine Yan to help." *She made a mistake.*

"In that kind of situation, even if my mother and I were to help you, what will it change?" Prince Zhou was telling the truth. "Even if Prince Han rushed back in time, do you think he would be able to change the Empress' mind? In order to protect her own son, the Empress is willing to sacrifice anyone. Even Consort Han."

"I was ignorant. I actually hoped that Concubine Yan would save Consort Han." Fu Rou did not listen. "Why didn't I turn and run?"

Maybe I could have ran away and find someone else that would help me.”

“The Empress was the one that wanted to kill Consort Han. Don’t push the blame on my mother.” He understood that she was hurting but Concubine Yan was his mother.

She laughed bitterly. “Just like this. All mothers want to protect their own children. As children, you will be biased to your mother. It is understandable in a normal household. But what about the Royal family? What about right and wrong? What about black and white? What about justice? What is more important for Great Tang’s benefit?”

His expression turned cold. “You are just a Siyan, you cannot manage the six higher ranks. Moreover, you serve the harem. In the main court, there are a lot of ministers and officials that will lead the country. Who are you to worry about Great Tang’s benefit?”

“I am a citizen of Great Tang. The nation’s ground was what raised me. It is my responsibility to worry. Don’t you remember? I learned this from your teacher.”

“Don’t think too highly of yourself.” He could only sigh. *Not everything that is learned can be applied.*

“I am not important. I am just an ant.” Ever since she entered the palace, she had been reminded time and time again. “But an ant also has its value and pride. This vast and magnificent Great Tang was also built by all you high and noble ants of Great Tang.”

He could not say anything else and chose to change the topic. “I will find a way to rescue you.”

She hugged her knees. “There is no need. Consort Han is dead, Sheng Chumu must be depressed. Let me suffer in here as a way of accompanying him.”

At this moment, she hated Lizheng Palace and did not want to go back.

Sun Lingshu looked at the table full of sumptuous dishes without moving. The Crown Prince entered and saw that she was not eating. He personally took a spoon, scooped some soup and brought it to her lips. Her listless eyes suddenly lit up again. She opened her mouth and allowed him to feed her.

"I only have a few people left by my side. For my sake, you have to take care of your health."

Her heart was extremely forlorn, absent of joy. "Mmhm." *She would take care of herself.*

"It was a pity your sister..." He had seen their relationship before. "I know that you are upset but you have to get through this. You have to bear with it until the day I ascend the throne."

"Crown Prince." She paused and looked at him silently. "Tell me. Do you think Lingwei's death was worth it?"

"Consort Han took her own life and it severely affected Prince Han and the Duke Lu Residence. Moreover, Imperial Mother is finally standing on my side. Although this may sound heartless, your sister's death really helped me." He was grateful.

She smiled, "As long as I can help you, my sister's death is worth it..."

He froze, and a look of contemplation flashed through his eyes. He reached out and held her pale face, silently staring deep into her eyes.

This chapter broke my heart. I was in so much emotional pain. Prince Han's reaction brought tears to my eyes.

It is so sad...

Btw, the novel only has 98 chapters. Please hang in there, readers! Don't drop the novel! You have to find out what happens at the end!!!

Court Lady

Friends, we're announcing the release of '[The Regressed Demon Lord is Kind](#)', and updating the initial 6-book Amazon release of Sovereign of the Three Realms, with the next 6 books in the series waiting for Amazon approval!

The Regressed Demon Lord is Kind: This is a rather different story from most of the reincarnation stories we've seen in the past! In his past life, Zich was an outcast youth who, in an obsessive quest for power, became known as the 'Demon Lord of Strength'. His reign, however, came to an end...

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On the day of Consort Han's funeral, those who knew the truth did not dare to come and send her off. Those who did not know the truth did not come for some unknown reason as well. However, there were also some who came to send her off, unafraid of offending those in power. One of them was Ma Hainiu.

Ma Hainiu had not imagined that the third brother of the Sheng family would openly offend Prince Han in front of Consort Han's coffin. Sheng Chumu and Sheng Chuling held Sheng Chujun back while he raged.

Sheng Chuling yelled, "Chujun, have you gone mad? This is our Brother-in-law!"

Sheng Chujun also yelled, "No, he is not my Brother-in-law! He is a greed filled bastard! If he didn't want to become the Crown Prince, he would not have offended the Eastern Palace. Would Lingwei still have become an innocent pond fish dragged into the mess? The jujube cake that poisoned Lingwei to death was sent by the Han Mansion. My sister would never have poisoned others so it can only be him. To poison the Crown Prince, he placed poison in the jujube cake. Then he shifted the responsibility and made Sister become his scapegoat! Let me go, I will kill him!"

Sheng Chuling held on to his brother. "Brother-in-law is not that kind

of person. Calm down!”

With reddened eyes, Sheng Chujun said, “Second Brother, you are calm because you are about to marry the Princess. What about me? Lingwei has died, Elder Sister...Elder Sister has also died. Why hasn’t he sought out the Empress who forced Sister to her death? It is also his scheme! I will take revenge for Elder Sister! I will take revenge for Lingwei!”

Sheng Chumu took big steps as he walked over and kicked Sheng Chujun down. Even Ma Hainiu could feel the pain with that blow.

Sheng Chumu bellowed, “Get lost!”

Sheng Chujun laughed in sorrow on the floor. “Elder Brother, you and Prince Han are in cahoots. From the beginning, you two were trying to go against the Crown Prince. I did not believe the rumour from the Eastern Palace that the Crown Prince’s leg was injured by you. When you were struck by a hundred strokes of the cane, I felt the injustice for you too. I am so dumb, so dumb! It is alright if you want to fight for power, it is fine if you want to go against the Crown Prince. Why did you have to use such a cruel method of poison and make Lingwei a sacrificial piece? Why must you pin the blame on Sister when things fell through? I hate you all, I hate you all!”

Sheng Chumu stepped forward and kicked Sheng Chujun again. This time, Sheng Chujun flew out of the door and rolled down the steps. He spat blood from his mouth.

Sheng Chumu coldly ordered, “Chase him out. He is not allowed to enter the Han Mansion again.”

Sheng Chujun burst into laughter. “Sister! Sister! This is the brother you have always doted on! This is the elder brother whom I have always looked up to! Sister, where is your soul with a vengeance?”

The guards ran forward and pulled Sheng Chujun away. Sheng Chumu expressionlessly watched this scene and heard the uproarious laughter slowly fade away.

Ma Hainiu forgot her sadness and only felt the cruelty behind what

had unfolded.

“Sheng Chujun made a scene at the Mourning Hall and accused Prince Han of making his sister a scapegoat. He wanted to kill Prince Han but was beaten up by Chumu. When he returned to the Duke Lu Residence, he went into Sheng Chumu’s room and made a mess out of it. Then, he disappeared after taking the letter that the Crown Prince wrote to Prince Zhao. Consort Han’s death has driven a wedge in the Duke Lu Residence.” Lian Yan’er said.

“Ma Hainiu has already informed me about Sheng Chujun’s scene at the Mourning Hall.” This voice came from Yan Zifang. He was seated opposite of Lian Yan’er.

They were at a quiet corner of the streets, an ideal place for them to talk.

“I have one question.” Fang Ziyan asked, “How did Sheng Chujun know that the letter that the Crown Prince wrote to Prince Zhao was in Sheng Chumu’s room?”

Lian Yan’er smiled lightly. “What do you think?” She was a person who could enter Sheng Chumu’s room whenever she wanted.

“You are smart indeed. Sheng Chujun is also very emotional. I never expected that he would love the Crown Princess’ sister so much.”

“In Sheng Chujun’s heart, Prince Han was the person who poisoned the jujube cakes. Prince Han was greedy and wanted to take the Crown Prince position for himself. As such, he ended up killing Sheng Chujun’s beloved Sun Lingwei although he wanted to poison the Crown Prince to death. When the Crown Prince investigated the crime, Prince Han pushed the blame onto his consort and sacrificed her. His brother, Sheng Chumu, is Prince Han’s accomplice.” Lian Yan’er had not imagined that things would turn out this way. She sighed. “Sheng Chumu also said that he must be informed once Sheng Chujun returns to Duke Lu Residence. However, I do not think that Sheng Chujun will ever return.”

“Do you feel sorry for Sheng Chumu?”

“At Swallow House, he was once the person I looked forward to seeing the most. It was also because of him that I decided to leave Swallow House. When he returned from Guangzhou City and appeared before me again, I understood. No matter how well a guest treated you, no matter how sweet his words are, he can always take back his heart anytime. A girl from the brothel will always be a girl from the brothel. When a guy is bored, he can play with you. But when he doesn't like you, he can ignore you. This logic is acceptable and the lack of guilt and feelings are non-existent.” Lian Yan'er raised her eyebrows lightly. “For a guy who does not like me, why must I place him in my heart?”

Yan Zifang came to a realization. “So you chose Haihu.”

“Ma Haihu is not the best but he is the one who is most sincere to me. I have seen many men in this lifetime and I know clearly who I should treasure.” *She, Lian Yan'er, was willing to give her all to Mai Haihu.*

“A foolish person will have foolish happiness. Ma Haihu is a person who does not even know how to use a fishing rod but has actually managed to fish a mermaid like you. You are even willing to take the risk and enter the Duke Lu Residence.” *In the beginning, Yan Zifang did not have much expectations of her.*

“Not for him, I did it for myself.” Lian Yan'er could teach Mai Hainiu three golden rules because she was an example herself. “I told you, I like him but I do not want to become a laughing joke. I want him to become a court official so that he can hold his head high and I can proudly marry him.”

Lian Yan'er stood up and walked off.

Lizheng Palace had never been so silent before. Empress Zhangsun sat defeatedly on chair, it has already been a few days since she could stand up. Today, Prince Qin asked about Fu Rou when he came to visit her. Empress Zhangsun did not reply. Actually, when the news

of Consort Han's death reached her, she had calmed down. She knew that Fu Rou had not spoken out of selfishness and Fu Rou was only trying to prevent an innocent person from being accused. However, Empress Zhangsun was also helpless.

The guards outside her palace reported that Prince Han had arrived.

Empress Zhangsun sighed. Prince Han had not visited her ever since he returned from Chang'an so she could only instruct someone to call him to her. Some words had to be spoken face to face.

Prince Han entered the room and bowed. He did not speak further.

"She was my daughter-in-law and I pitied her. However, it is a severe crime to send poisonous jujube cake to the Eastern Palace and no one could save her. Even if she was interrogated by the Justice Office, she would be humiliated and in the end, it was also hard for her to escape death. It is better that she left this way with her dignity. Her family would also not be harmed." Although she knew that Fu Rou was right, she could not admit it for the Crown Prince and Prince Han. "Prince Han, do not blame me, I also do not feel good."

Prince Han remained emotionless and his tone was calm. "I do not dare to."

Empress Zhangsun grew more worried. "Prince Han....."

Prince Han remained respectful. "Like Imperial Mother said, blood brothers are like hands and feet and wives are like clothes. Consort Han was only a piece....I got used to. A comfortable piece of clothing I liked to wear. Now that she is gone, what else can I say? I have already mourned for many days and I cannot continue to be sad."

The one before him was his mother who raised him but he was so angry on the inside that he was about to blow up. *Just because of a few words from the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, his consort was killed! Did the Empress only have the Crown Prince as her son? He was always the one who gave into the Crown Prince. He always had to think of the Eastern Palace. Who would think of him?*

Empress Zhangsun was slightly rest assured. "Right, this is the way.

You must hold yourself up again. After some time has passed, I will pick a lady who is perfect for you.”

Prince Han suddenly burst into laughter. “Let’s talk about that in the future. Otherwise, I will be hated by the Crown Prince again. Imperial Mother, you can’t possibly ask me to change clothes all the time. When will I finally have clothes that I am comfortable in?”

Empress Zhangsun could sense his displeasure and she grew anxious.

“In the past, I absorbed myself in poetry and music and did not have much ambition. I am unfilial for not understanding Imperial Father’s sacrifice in building this country. But after learning from pain, I want to turn over a new leaf now. As a prince of Great Tang, I cannot indulge myself in luxuries and not give back. In the future, I will take part in court matters and voice my opinions to contribute to Great Tang’s future. I will share Imperial Father’s worries with him.” *He had given in all the time. Since the Crown Prince could not see it, he would no longer hold it in!*

Empress Zhangsun stared at Prince Han in shock.

Prince Han continued, “Please rest assured, Imperial Mother. In the future, the Crown Prince and I will be brothers in court and cooperate wholeheartedly. Imperial Mother, please take care of yourself. I will leave now.”

Empress Zhangsun was blank for a moment. She suddenly came to a realisation. *She was wrong, horribly wrong.* She had personally pushed Prince Han to stand on the opposite side of the Crown Prince. Without Consort Han, his hate could no longer be resolved. A sudden pain went through her head and she spurted out blood. With shivering hands, she tried to reach for the medicine bottle but knocked it over instead. However, there was no one before her to help her pick it up anymore.

The Empress is so selfish. Honestly, most of the characters in the novel are selfish. They only care about themselves or rising in the ranks/maintaining their power.

Court Lady

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This day, the Crown Prince and Prince Han were in conflict during the morning court.

A few days ago, the Crown Prince brought up the Court Official Examination and placed Lu Yunji in charge of it. At that point, Prince Han raised an objection. Using Official Hu Ningwu from Sheng Country as an example of a greedy court official who took advantage of the citizens and robbed women among various other misdeeds, Prince Han wondered why Lu Yunji had given Hu Ningwu a positive referral. The Crown Prince felt that Prince Han was targetting him but Prince Han had evidence of Lu Yunji accepting bribes.

The Emperor saw this matter with great importance and he immediately ordered for the Ministry of Appointments Assistant Minister to oversee the investigation.

The Crown Prince returned to the Eastern Palace, fuming. "What nonsense! He tried to poison me but on behalf of Imperial Mother's face, I took it out only on Consort Han and let him go. However, he is suddenly acting outrageous by publicly offending me in court!"

Fu Shui stood by and commented, "Your Highness, you should have hardened your resolve to go against Prince Han earlier on. It was a pity that you were fooled multiple times by his acts of loyalty."

Sun Lingshu chimed in, "I tried to persuade Your Highness many

times. There isn't a single good person in the Han Mansion. Your Highness is too kind."

Fu Shui added, "Speaking of which, the Crown Princess' sister had to sacrifice her life to expose Prince Han's true face. Your Highness, you must treat the Crown Princess better in the future."

Sun Lingshu immediately shot a glance at Fu Shui but Fu Shui maintained calm.

"I do not need you to remind me. I know how the Crown Princess feels towards me." The Crown Prince frowned. "Now, how are we going to teach Prince Han a lesson?"

"It is very easy." Fu Shui's tone was calm. "Prince Han wants to use Lu Yunji to drag you down, you must not let him succeed."

"I am well aware of Lu Yunji's greed. I am afraid that he really accepted bribes through the Court Official Examination. Imperial Father's decision to take away the authority of the Court Official Examination from Lu Yunji and give it to Assistant Minister Zhao means that Imperial Father has suspicions against Lu Yunji. If the investigators get a testimony from Hu Ningwu giving bribes to Lu Yunji, things could worsen."

Evil thoughts once again raced through Sun Lingshu's mind. "Are we going to give up Lu Yunji?"

"If I can't even keep Lu Yunji by my side, what power do I have as the Crown Prince? If Imperial Father was still at Hot Spring Palace, is there anything I can't do here? Now that Imperial Father is at Chang'an, my hands and feet are bound and I can't do anything."

"If we can't do anything within Chang'an, we can take actions outside Chang'an."

Fu Shui was confident.

"Are you suggesting that we settle it with Hu Ningwu?" The Crown Prince asked.

"Silence him?" Sun Lingshu was more vicious.

"It is no use to silence Hu Ningwu. If Lu Yunji accepted bribes, he must have accepted bribes from others besides Hu Ningwu. Since Prince Han has his eyes on this matter, he will definitely see it to the end. Without Hu Ningwu, there will still be Zhou Ningwu and Zhang Ningwu." Fu Shui was the most vicious. "Going against Sheng Country. The Emperor is not happy with Lu Yunji's greed but he did not arrest Lu Yunji and interrogate him in jail. Firstly, this is because of Lu Yunji's past merits. Secondly, this is also because of his military talents. If Sheng Country revolts, Great Tang must send the military out to suppress the revolt. Your Highness, who do you think the Emperor's first choice of military general would be?"

The Crown Prince answered, "It must be Lu Yunji. It was Lu Yunji who led the military to victory in Sheng Country the last time too. However, Sheng Country is not revolting now."

Fu Shui laughed. "They are not revolting but we can force them to revolt. Since the public sentiment in Sheng Country is not good, we can give them a little fire and let them burn."

The Crown Prince hesitated before gritting his teeth together. "Good. Prince Han and I will be on opposite sides till death!"

Empress Zhangsun passed away beside the Emperor in her sleep.

The day before she passed away, it seemed like she knew that her time was near and she pleaded to the Emperor to agree to Xinnan and Sheng Chuling's marriage. She also prayed for a protective amulet for the Crown Prince and Prince Han. There was nothing she could do for things that had already occurred and she did not know if she could prevent the inevitable from happening. Hence, she used her last breath to pray.

The Emperor was in despair. The two of them had walked through thick and thin and the Empress had never complained while she helped him, took charge of the harem and took care of his parents and brother. No matter what happened, she had always supported him and her illness had been the result of her hard work. Although he pleaded that she should rest, she did not give up her duties. In the

end, she passed away from exhaustion. She could finally take a break now.

The Crown Prince and Prince Han kneeled in the Mourning Hall, it was rare that they were face to face with each other again. However, the hatred and anger in their eyes could not hide their overwhelming grief of losing their mother.

The Emperor now understood roughly why the Empress had pleaded that he spared their lives no matter what trouble they gave and how much they fought with each other. He just wished that things would not turn out that badly and the kinship between the brothers would wake them up from their hatred towards each other.

Xinnan could not stop crying. Although she was stubborn, she was pure and innocent and she received the love from the Emperor and Empress.

“Xinnan, you have already kneeled for a whole day and night. There is still the Crown Prince and Prince Han who needs to pay their respects.” The Emperor called for men to bring her away.

Xinnan cried as she walked away. Finally, she stopped beside the lake.

The light from the sun reflected off the surface of the lake and showed her face full of tears. She did not know what happened between her brothers since the two did not speak at all. Personally, she could not even find a chance to speak to them. Either the Crown Princess would pull the Crown Prince away or Prince Han would explain that he had matters to attend to. She felt that not only had she lost her Imperial Mother, she had also lost her Imperial Brothers.

Xinnan was even more upset and she sobbed loudly. Suddenly, someone grabbed her hand. In shock, she turned around to see Sheng Chuling.

“You...why are you here?” Xinnan cried. She wanted to smile at him but only tears fell down her face.

“When Elder Brother was met with an accident before, you stayed by

my side while I was sad. Now that the Empress has passed away and you are in grief, I must stay by your side and accompany her.” He had been there all along, silently accompanying her.

“As much as I am sad, you cannot enter the Royal Palace secretly. If you are caught, you will be executed.” *She had been rash the previous time and caused a scene. Luckily, her Imperial Mother had protected them. However, her Imperial Mother was no longer around.* “Go quickly, don’t let anyone discover you.”

He patted his chest confidently. “Who said I snuck in here secretly?”

“The Crown Prince didn’t dismiss you from your position as a guard of the Eastern Palace?” *She did not understand.*

“It is true that I am no longer a guard of the Eastern Palace. I am now a Secret Guard beside you.” *He had to use another method if the first one did not work.*

“How can this be? You are lying.” *She could not believe it.*

“I saw the Emperor.” *A man must take responsibility.* “I begged the Emperor and told him that you must be very sad now and you might need someone to console you. I wanted to see you.”

“Imperial Father actually agreed?” *Could she be dreaming?*

“The Emperor said that the Empress had been worrying about Your Highness’ marriage before she passed on. She must have been very worried about Your Highness. For the Empress to be at peace in heaven, the Emperor wanted to take care of Your Highness on the Empress’ behalf. Therefore, I was sent to be a Secret Guard by your side.”

“Imperial Mother..... You are so good to me but I have always made you angry and I did not listen to your words... Imperial Mother! Imperial Mother!” Princess Xinnan cried again as she leaned against Sheng Chuling’s shoulder.

He winced in pain.

Princess Xinnan was worried. “Did I press on your wound? Is your

injury still not well?" *She wanted to take her head off his shoulder.*

Sheng Chuling made a proud expression. "Isn't a man's shoulder for his woman to lean on? I can handle it."

Princess Xinnan was touched. Although she continued to lean on his shoulder, she secretly supported herself with the tree beside them, easing some weight off his shoulder.

He was all she had. From this day onwards, they would be each other's burden and each other's happiness.

Court Lady

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Amidst Chang'an's intensely cold atmosphere, Yan Zifang arrived at Liang Residence to deliver a gift.

Grand Prince Liang had just woken up as he yawned. "Isn't this such an unlucky year? The Crown Princess' sister died and Prince Han lost his wife as well. Soon, the Empress also passed away. Why are all the royal relatives going to heaven one after the other? So unlucky."

Yan Zifang's expression did not change. "They may be unlucky but it doesn't matter as long as it doesn't affect you."

"That is true." Grand Prince Liang thought about it and sighed, "Sigh, Sister-in-law is too serious. Even as an Empress, she doesn't know how to enjoy and always worry about things. How can she live a long life? However, after Grand Emperor passed away, she took care of me pretty well. It is just that..."

Grand Prince Liang paused at this point, and looked unhappy once more. "Because of her, we have to mourn again. All princes and ministers are not allowed to celebrate and we can't even drink. I am so bored."

"If you can't drink alcohol, then you should drink soup." Yan Zifang waved to Ma Haihu and a pot was placed on the table. "Today, I came especially to give you this delicious chicken soup. Please kindly accept it, Your Highness..."

Grand Prince Liang opened the pot and took a sniff. "Good lad, where did you get this Weichuan Mulberry..."

Yan Zifang maintained a serious look and reminded him. "Weichuan Chicken Soup."

"Right, chicken soup, chicken soup." As he spoke, Grand Prince Liang lifted the pot and drank a huge mouth. He savoured it. "The previous two pots...two pots of chicken soup that you gave me! I could not forget the taste after I had finished them. My craving for them has already been growing. Yan Zifang, you know me best."

Yan Zifang saw that Grand Prince Liang was in a good mood and asked, "Your Highness, now the Crown Prince and Prince Han are fighting against each other, I wonder if Your Highness has thought of who to side with?"

"Is there a need to think? Of course I am on the Crown Prince's side. Prince Han is a sage and extremely virtuous. He doesn't like me and I don't like him." Grand Prince Liang did not even need to consider.

"Your Highness, do you really think you have stood on the Crown Prince's side?" Yan Zifang saw how Grand Prince Liang started to glare at him and continued, "Forgive me for being direct. From what I see, the Crown Prince at most treats you as someone to have fun with. In the Crown Prince's heart, it seems like he does not treat you as a confidante."

Grand Prince Liang was not surprised. "The Crown Prince rarely shares the Eastern Palace's thinking and plans with me, much less asks for my opinion. I want to grab onto the opportunity but I can't. It is not like I can just go up to the Crown Prince and tell him to not only think of me as a drinking buddy but to also call me when he is discussing important things."

"I came here this time to give you two gifts. The first was the chicken soup. The second gift is a person." This was Yan Zifang's real motive.

"A person?" Grand Prince Liang thought cunningly. "A beauty? That's right! Why didn't I think of it? As long as he is a man, beauties will always work. The Crown Prince is a man. I should have sent a few

beauties to him. If the Crown Prince is happy and the beauties that I send speak well of me, then won't he look highly upon me?"

A flash of annoyance appeared in Yan Zifang's eyes. However, he maintained a patient tone. "Not a beauty. I have already brought the person. Why don't Your Highness take a look?"

Grand Prince Liang looked out curiously, only to see Sheng Chujun standing outside the door.

His face immediately changed. "Bastard! Why did you bring someone from the Duke Lu Residence?"

Yan Zifang smiled. "Your Highness, this is a rare chance. The Sheng brothers are fighting internally and now, Sheng Chumu's third brother hates Prince Han and Sheng Chumu to the core. There is a military saying. To know yourself is to know your enemy and emerge victorious every time. He is familiar with both the Duke Lu Residence and Han Mansion. If you can bring him over to the Crown Prince's side, you will be providing the Crown Prince with the best weapon against Prince Han. You will have a plan and have contributed. How can the Crown Prince not regard you highly?"

Grand Prince Liang understood. "Sheng Chujun siding with the Eastern Palace is like a knife to Prince Han. Two of Duke Lu's sons, one is siding with Prince Han while one is siding with Eastern Palace. The biological brothers have become enemies. Just this fact itself will pissed Sheng Xiaojing off."

Yan Zifang lowered his eyes. "Your Highness is brilliant." He suddenly raised his voice. "Chujun, come in."

Sheng Chujun entered, wearing a serious expression. "Greetings, Your Highness."

Grand Prince Liang smiled enthusiastically. "We are all together, there is no need to be so polite. Sheng Chujun, trust me. I will not treat you unfairly. I had long ago seen Prince Han's true side. He pretends to be loyal, amiable and virtuous. Your sister was beautiful and died for him. What a pity." Every few sentences, he had to talk about women.

“Prince Han used unscrupulous means for power and killed so many innocent people. I have already sworn in front of my sister’s coffin that from now on, I will not side with Han Mansion.” Sheng Chujun retrieved a letter from his embrace. “This was what I took from his room.”

Grand Prince Liang looked at the letter. “Is this...the letter the Crown Prince wrote to Prince Zhao?”

Sheng Chujun replied, “Sheng Chumu holding on to the letter is like holding onto the Crown Prince’s weakness. The Crown Prince is the future ruler of Great Tang. Secretly creating trouble and causing the position of Crown Prince to waver is betrayal to Great Tang. For their own selfish desire, they killed Sun Lingwei and my sister. I cannot stand it anymore. In the past, people could kill their family for justice. Can’t I do the same? I have to kill Prince Han to avenge my sister and Sun Lingwei. I must make Sheng Chumu kneel in front of their tombs and repent. This is the punishment he deserves!”

“Very good! Killing your family for justice. May your noble spirit last forever! However, you alone are not enough to deal with Han Mansion. We have to cooperate with Eastern Palace. I will bring you both to meet the Crown Prince right now.” Grand Prince Liang turned back to shout, “Yan Zifang...Yan Zifang?”

Yan Zifang pulled himself back to reality.

On the opposite side of the garden, Lu Yingying had just turned the corner, holding a wash basin in her hands.

When the Crown Prince got a hold of the letter, he was overjoyed. “This is truly the letter that I sent Prince Zhao. So it had landed in Sheng Chumu’s hands. If Sheng Chujun did not steal the letter back, they would definitely present this letter to Imperial Father to create trouble for me. They will conspire to link me up with Prince Zhao’s rebellion and I would have suffered. Chujun, luckily you have principles.”

Grand Prince Liang fought to have a part. “As soon as I knew Chujun

had fallen out with Prince Han and Sheng Chumu and left the Duke Lu Residence, I immediately sent people to look for him. I brought him here as soon as I found him. I knew that he would be useful to you.”

The Crown Prince smiled. “Uncle, you have done well. In the past, I only thought that you were good at hunting eagles. I never thought you would have such a thoughtful side.”

“I don’t like to boast and you will only know after knowing me for a while. Oh right. Your Highness, Yan Zifang also helped quite a bit.”

Yan Zifang stepped forward. “Greetings, Your Highness.”

The Crown Prince assessed Yan Zifang. He knew that Yan Zifang used to be a pirate and was slightly suspicious.

Fu Shui said, “I heard that General Yan has managed the West City extremely well and helped the citizens. He brought Zhang Li and Xu Liangping to justice. Xu Liangping is the brother-in-law of You Jianming, the one who spoke in court about giving your Crown Prince position to Prince Han.”

The Crown Prince looked at Yan Zifang once more with a satisfied expression. “If You Jianming’s brother-in-law has been committing outrages, You Jianming will also not be able to escape. How dare he make trouble for me. Yan Zifang, you are not afraid of punishing your fellow officials and seeking justice for the citizens. You have good personal integrity.”

Yan Zifang replied politely, “Zhang Li and Xu Liangping were corrupted and they bullied the citizens. Since the Emperor trusts me, I cannot let them continue their misdeeds.”

The Crown Prince invited them to the garden to eat. Grand Prince Liang and Sheng Chujun walked out first. Yan Zifang was shoulder to shoulder with Fu Shui as they followed behind.

Fu Shui looked forward and maintained a natural expression. “You have already made an impression with the Crown Prince. Congratulations.”

Yan Zifang remained indifferent as well. However, his tone was polite. “Thank you for coming up with this idea.”

Court Lady

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Fu Rou had just swept the leaves into a pile when the cold wind blew it all over the place again. She could only use her hands to pick up the leaves and place it in the basket. Empress Zhangsun had passed away and she was released from prison. She had been reassigned to the Lateral Courts.

Here was where palace maids stayed. There were also some women from noble families that had been punished to become servants. She was still considered lucky that she only became a regular palace maid that had to work in the Lateral Courts.

Fu Rou was extremely mournful that she did not get to see the Empress for the last time and she had passed away under such unhappy circumstances. However, she had no intentions of returning to Lizheng Palace and she slowly became used to the tough yet simple life in the Lateral Courts.

Every few years, the Lateral Courts would release a few palace maids. As long as she did well here, maybe she would have the chance to regain her freedom. At the same time, she could avoid the plots and schemes that she hated.

After picking an entire basket of leaves, she leaned against a bamboo pole to catch her breath.

“Oi, are you already thinking of slacking off?” An older palace maid

appeared from nowhere.

“The superiors assigned everyone to take care of one section. I am in charge of this area while you are in charge of that.” *She was doing work meant to be done by three people.*

“Eh, are you trying to pick a fight? In the Lateral Courts, the rules are based on seniority. I am a senior in the Lateral Courts and you are new. You have to do anything I ask you to.”

Another palace maid clicked her tongue and walked closer. “Look at you, aren’t you embarrassed? How can you say that she is new. She used to be a female official and was extremely favoured by the Empress. Do you think you can order her around? She came from high up there.”

“I don’t care how much you were favoured in the past. Even a phoenix turns into nothing more than a chicken after losing everything. I am the leader of this section. If you disobey me, watch how I will punish you.” The senior palace maid lifted her hand and looked like she was about to slap Fu Rou.

“What are you all doing?” An internal attendant suddenly turned round the corner and shouted as he saw the scene in front of him. “Is this your house? You all are speaking so loudly. If you annoy the noble ladies, how many lives do you have to pay?”

A majestic figure walked around the corner and past the internal attendant. He kept walking.

The internal attendant shouted, “General Sheng, wait for...”

As the senior palace maid saw Fu Rou looking at Sheng Chumu’s rear view, she walked behind Fu Rou. She pushed her and lifted her hand, about to hit her.

Fu Rou grabbed onto her wrist. “Who are you to hit me? Even if I did not follow the rules, according to the palace rules, you can only record it and report it to the Managerial Department. Punishing palace maids is the duty of the Managerial Department. You are in no position to abuse it and deal out punishments on your own.”

“Aiya, do you think you are the head of the Court Lady Department? You keep talking about rules. Today, I am going to personally punish you, what can you do about it?”

The senior palace maid wanted to grab Fu Rou but Fu Rou struggled violently. Another palace maid walked up to help and Fu Rou was eventually held down by them.

The senior palace maid took a hairpin from her hair as she gritted her teeth. “Aren’t you arrogant just because you have a pretty face? If I draw ten scars across your face, let’s see how arrogant you can be!”

Fu Rou snorted, “You dare!”

“Ha, in the Lateral Courts, there are so many people that try to use their beauty to gain favours with the rich. Until their death, they never ever manage to be favoured even once. Do you really think you can seduce a prince? You should give up!” Her hairpin shot towards Fu Rou’s face.

A hand suddenly appeared, grabbing tightly.

“You hit the nail on the head. This woman doesn't know anything else but she is skilled in seducing princes. I am one of the princes that have gone crazy for her.” Grand Prince Liang appeared, his tone not changing. “You all must be extremely bold to bully the lady I like. You are so ugly and only know how to be jealous of other people’s pretty faces. I have always loved beautiful jades and hate all ugly, evil and jealous women like you. People like you are a waste of food. You should just kill yourself.”

The two palace maids were so shocked they started kowtowing in fright.

Fu Rou spoke, “Your Highness, they have done wrong and should be handed to the Managerial Department to be punished. It goes against the rules to dish out your own punishment.”

“You are so stubborn and by the book. Aren’t you annoying?” Grand Prince Liang sighed, “No wonder you almost got disfigured.”

The palace maids immediately begged Fu Rou to save them.

However, Grand Prince Liang bellowed for them to “Get lost” and they ran away in fright.

Fu Rou wanted to leave as well. Grand Prince Liang reached out to stop Fu Rou. “Stop right there. I never said that you could leave.”

Fu Rou cautiously took a step back. “Your Highness, what other instructions do you have?”

Grand Prince Liang took a step closer. “I can’t talk to you if I have nothing to ask?”

Fu Rou frowned. “The country is in mourning. Please be mindful, Your Highness.”

“Why? Are you afraid that I will eat you? Back then, I was blind that’s why I liked such an unromantic woman like you. Take this.” He threw a small bottle to Fu Rou.

Fu Rou caught the bottle. “This...”

“In the past, I stole...er, no. I borrowed a medicinal pill from you.” Grand Prince Liang looked slightly hurt. “I had wanted to give it to my Imperial Father, but he declined. Now that I have no use for it, I am returning it to you.”

Fu Rou found it strange. “...Thank you, Your Highness.”

“What is there to thank me? It was yours to begin with.” Grand Prince Liang did not think he did anything special.

“I am not thanking you for this medicinal pill. I am thanking you for helping me out just now.” As for this medicinal pill, she had no use for it as well. Initially, she wanted to give it to Sheng Chumu, but now they were strangers.

“It is nothing.” Grand Prince Liang was very relaxed. “When I got poisoned by the enemy’s weapon back on Cangshan Mountain, you were the one that saved me.”

Fu Rou found it strange once again. “It is such a small thing, I thought Your Highness would have forgotten about it.”

Grand Prince Liang was unhappy. "My brain is perfectly fine, do I seem like I am very forgetful?"

Fu Rou smiled.

Grand Prince Liang was still unhappy when he returned to the Liang Residence. The Emperor had summoned him and smelt the alcohol on him. The Emperor lectured him and punished him to reflect at home.

"You lost the Empress but she is not my wife. Why should I be mourning like you? I merely drank a bit. It is as if I committed a grave crime. Reflect at home?" Grand Prince Liang grumbled to himself as he turned towards the sky. "Imperial Father, now that you are no longer around, I am worthless. I have turned into a punching bag! If you are up there in heaven, open your eyes and take a look!"

The lady that he was currently pampering, sashayed in. "Your Highness, who did you ask to open their eyes? Isn't my eyes big enough? Which vixen have you caught your eye on now?"

Grand Prince Liang slapped the woman. "Bastard. Who are you to insult my Imperial Father?" He turned around to grab a whip.

The lady was frightened as she ran away. She suddenly saw Lu Yingying and pushed her towards Grand Prince Liang. Lu Yingying was caught off guard and knocked into Grand Prince Liang. The lady took the chance to escape.

"Bitch, you are nothing good either!" Grand Prince Liang pushed Lu Yingying to the ground as he raised his whip and started to hit Lu Yingying.

Lu Yingying subconsciously lifted her hand to cover her face. She exposed a bracelet on her wrist.

Grand Prince Liang froze. That bracelet had just been given to Lu Yingying by Imperial Concubine Sun that morning. She even spoke numerous good things about Lu Yingying to Grand Prince Liang. It was only then that he realised Lu Yingying had been accompanying his mother whenever he was not in the residence. No wonder, his mother had been energetic recently and her complexion seemed to

lighten. Grand Prince Liang was slightly moved.

In the end, Grand Prince Liang threw the whip to the side and returned to his room.

Lu Yingying was shocked as she crawled up. Sounds of things being thrown around the room filled her ears. She could not help but walk to the entrance of the room. She saw Grand Prince Liang punched the wall. The wall was fine but he was injured. His hand had split open and was bleeding.

“Your Highness, why would you do that?” *Hurting others and hurting yourself.*

He turned back and laughed bitterly, “Everyone's the same. They all call me Your Highness, but they all look down on me. You are no different from them...no. You are more cruel than them. They only look down on me whereas you are always humiliating me. You are my consort yet you only think of your adulterous partner.”

“Your Highness's hand is injured. Let me help you wrap it.” *There were few things she could do.*

“I don't need you to pretend to be nice!” He rolled his eyes.

She looked at the shattered porcelain on the ground and started to pick them up.

“You don't have to pick them! I get angry as soon as I see your face. You are ruining my eyes!” *Actually, his anger seemed to have lessened. He was more frustrated.*

Although she does not complain when she gets hit, it does not mean that she liked to be beaten. “I don't dare to ruin your eyes. I will take my leave.”

“Wait!” He shouted. She turned back to look at him calmly.

He suddenly lowered his voice. “You see that your husband's hand is injured. How can you take your leave as if nothing happened? Are you that heartless? Hurry and help me wrap my wound before I die from loss of blood!”

On his mother's behalf, he could bicker less with her.

Is Grand Prince Liang slowly redeeming himself?

I honestly did not expect him to help Fu Rou.

Court Lady

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Fu Rou was delivering food to a palace maid that had fallen sick. Her name was Xiao Lu. She was the daughter of an official that had been punished and was only thirteen years old. Her status in the Lateral Courts was even lower than normal maids. Naturally, she got bullied even more.

Xiao Lu was grateful. “Thank you for bringing me food, Sister Fu. I thought that no one would remember me and had intended to starve.”

“I thought that since the Lateral Court houses lower ranked palace maids and families of punished officials, everyone would take care of each other since they all came from unfortunate backgrounds. I never thought that it would be so cold.” *Everywhere, the high would be praised while the low would get stepped on.*

“Are they gossiping again?” Xiao Lu guessed.

“Just eat. Ignore them.” Fu Rou was able to ignore them.

Xiao Lu was not surprised. “I can’t be bothered with them. A group of pitiful worms that only know how to bully those more pitiful than themselves. I just need Sister Fu to take care of me. Sister Fu, just you alone is better than a thousand of them.”

“You are so young yet you know how to talk.” She made Fu Rou

laugh.

“Sister Fu, I heard that you are great at studying and have studied all the books in the world. Is that true?” Xiao Lu’s eyes lit up.

“No it is not. The number of books and records in the world is as boundless as the ocean. I won’t be able to read them all even if I have ten lives. I can only read and learn whenever I have time.”

Xiao Lu pleaded, “Then can you teach me to read as well? In the past, my father hired a tutor for me and I learned a bit but I feel like I know too little.”

“When you don’t know enough then you will desire to learn. Okay, in the future, I will bring you along.”

Xiao Lu was delighted. “Thank you, Sister!”

“Bring me along too. Teacher, I finally found you.” Prince Qin entered.

Prince Qin’s sudden appearance threw the Lateral Courts into chaos. Even the head of department was alerted and quickly came down. With everyone watching him, not only was he not willing to leave, he even sat down to eat with Fu Rou at the same table. It made those that had secretly taken away Fu Rou’s food sweat nervously. In the end, Prince Qin only left because Fu Rou persuaded him to.

Before Prince Qin left, he expressed that he would return. Fu Rou was the teacher that his Imperial Mother had assigned him with. Although his Imperial Mother was no longer around, she had never taken back her order so he was still Fu Rou’s student. He was going to come whenever he wanted. This unintentionally gave everyone else an order. *Whoever dares to bully Fu Rou would be going against him!*

In just a few days, both Grand Prince Liang and Prince Qin had stepped out for Fu Rou. Hearing that Prince Zhou also liked her, this made the head of Lateral Courts, who had wanted to make Fu Rou’s life difficult, develop a headache.

Wei Song reminded Prince Qin that Qingzui Palace was peaceful. It

would avoid the jealous attention from the palace maids and also avoid the path of the noble ladies.

The next morning, Fu Rou arrived early at Qingzui Palace. She was being led by a palace maid when she heard sounds of weeping. She looked in the direction of the cries and saw a room with a window. Through that window, she saw two wet nurses surrounding a child wearing a Qilin robe.

She asked in surprise, “Isn’t that the Imperial Grandson from the Eastern Palace?”

“Yes, that is him. He does not know how to do anything other than cry. I heard that he used to be in Lizheng Palace and the late Empress personally took care of him. However, after the late Empress fell critically ill, she was afraid of spreading the illness to him. She said that this place was peaceful and shifted him over here. Now, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess are mourning for the late Empress. After their period of mourning, they will probably bring him back to the Eastern Palace.” The palace maid seemed to recall something. “I won’t talk to you any longer, I have something to do. Since you are new here, you can walk around by yourself and familiarise with the place. If you want to find me, go to the room in the northwest corner.”

The palace maid left. However, Fu Rou could not move because of the child’s cries. She looked through the window.

All she saw was that the wet nurse that was carrying the Imperial Grandson became impatient and placed him back in the cradle. “Cry cry cry, all you know how to do is cry. Aren’t you annoying? You are already so old yet you don’t know how to call your parents. I think you were born a fool.”

The other wet nurse spoke, “Oi, you better be careful. Don’t let the Crown Princess hear you or she will tear your skin off.”

“The Crown Princess is mourning. She can’t hear me. Sigh, I think this foolish child is her retribution. She is always shouting about this and asking about that in the Eastern Palace. Previously, because of the investigation of some spy, I got beaten up for no reason.”

“With her as the master, who hasn’t been beaten in the Eastern Palace? Her suspicions are massive. Everyone seems like a spy to her.”

“Cry then cry. This place is so secluded, no one will hear. Let’s go out to drink some tea and save ourselves from this annoyance.”

The two wet nurses left just like that. They left the child to cry alone in the cradle.

Fu Rou saw that there was no one around and could not take it. She walked into the room and shook the cradle, attempting to humour the Imperial Grandson. The Imperial Grandson slowly quietened down.

At this moment, there were footsteps outside the door. Fu Rou thought that the two wet nurses were back. They would definitely not be happy to see her and she hid behind a screen. Unexpectedly, two internal attendants came in instead of the two wet nurses.

One of them said, “Hurry. Do it while there is no one else around.”

The other replied, “How do we do it?”

Fu Rou was startled by this.

“Haven’t I taught you earlier? Use a pillow to cover him.”

The other was clearly more cowardly and his voice trembled, “I can’t do it.”

“Fool. This is the chance of a lifetime. If we kill this child, the Crown Prince has no descendants and with his disability he will definitely be abdicated. When the new Crown Prince is elected, you will be awarded for having huge contributions. Didn’t you say that you want to be higher than Chief Cao? This is an extremely rare chance.” *This person only knew how to talk and push things to others.*

“But...but I am extremely terrified. Why don’t you do it?”

“It is too late to back down! You are already here. If you don’t kill him, when you return, they won’t let you live. Do it quickly. This

child is just a small thing. Cover his mouth and nose until he has no more air. Then cover him with a blanket. There are many children who get strangled in their sleep because the people taking care of them were not careful. With the wet nurses as scapegoats, what are you afraid of? Hurry!”

Fu Rou could not bear to listen anymore. She dashed out of the screen and pushed down the two internal attendants. She carried the Imperial Grandson and ran out.

As she ran, she shouted, “Help! Guards!” However, her cries for help were like a stone that is thrown into the ocean. There was not a single person around.

Eventually, Fu Rou managed to run out of Qingzui Palace and saw two imperial guards standing in front of her. She sighed in relief. “Come and help! Someone is trying to kill the Imperial Grandson! They are chasing after me!”

The internal attendants running after her shouted at the imperial guards. “The plot has been exposed. Hurry! Help me catch that woman! If anyone else hears about this, we will all die!”

The imperial guards turned to chase after her aggressively. Fu Rou quickly made the decision and ran into another corridor with the Imperial Grandson. She hid in a side room. Her heart was pounding as she could not fathom what had just happened. Empress Zhangsun’s corpse had yet to turn cold and there was already someone targeting the Eastern Palace. They were not even willing to let an innocent child live.

Han Mansion? In her frenzy, the possibility floated through her mind. However, she immediately rejected it. It was not possible!

All of a sudden, the child in her arms started crying and attracted the group to the door.

“Open up! If you are smart, you better hand the child over and we will let you live.”

She did not know who they were and did not care to know. They

were all as bad as each other.

Fu Rou pressed her back against the door. "Killing the Imperial Grandson is an extremely unforgivable crime and will cause your entire family to be killed. If you all are willing to turn back to the right path, hurry up and turn yourselves in. Maybe your family will be spared."

"What nonsense is she saying? Kick down the door and kill the both of them."

Fu Rou used false words to try and intimidate them. "Don't try anything. I have a knife with me."

"Don't talk about a knife, even if you have a long and sharp sword, killing you would be easy."

Fu Rou chuckled coldly, "Killing me is easy. But before I die, not only will I cut myself I might even cut the Imperial Grandson. Didn't you all want to kill him without leaving behind any trace? Didn't you want to strangle him with a pillow and blame it on the wet nurses? If the Imperial Grandson was known to be murdered and even have a few scars on him, the case will be blown up. The Emperor will definitely pursue the matter. As the saying goes, you cannot run away from the arm of law. I want to see how capable all of you are to escape from the law."

There was silence on the other side. A person with a sharp voice asked, "I wonder which sister is inside? There is no palace maid as knowledgeable as you in Qingzui Palace."

"I wouldn't dare to be the sister of someone that commits such a crime. My name is Fu Rou."

"Fu Rou? Are you the Fu Siyan that once served the late Empress?"

"Yes." At this point, there was no point in hiding her identity.

"Aiya, so it is Fu Siyan. This is all just a misunderstanding."

"When did murder become a misunderstanding?" Her eyes swept around the room, attempting to find another escape.

“Palace Maid Fu, in order to help Consort Han, you went against the Empress and was punished. We are all helping Prince Han and are on the same boat.”

Dun dun dun....

Court Lady

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“Liars! Prince Han is not insane!” She did not believe him and was thinking clearly. “If it was really Prince Han that sent you all, then he would have lost all reason. What you all should be doing is to persuade him, not help him commit such audacities.”

“Consort Han was killed by Eastern Palace. It is only normal that Prince Han wants to take revenge. Ultimately, we are just standing up for justice. The people at Eastern Palace are not good either. Didn't they harm you as well? If we bring down the Eastern Palace, Prince Han will definitely become the new Crown Prince and you will also have achievements at that time. Not to mention becoming a Siyan again, it would also be possible for you to become a court lady. Qingzui Palace is desolated and this opportunity was given by heaven. You just need to end that child's life and you will gain all the riches in the world.”

“Sacrificing the lives of innocents just to achieve your goal, what justice...”

Fu Rou had yet to finish her sentence when the door was pushed open. She fell to the ground from the force. However, she still put herself in front of the Imperial Grandson and protected him. She closed her eyes and shouted, “You bunch of scoundrels! You will die a horrible death!”

She clearly heard footsteps but no one spoke. Fu Rou found it strange and turned out carefully to look. She saw Wei Song smile.

“Wei Song? Are you...even you...” *Even you could not withstand the lure of power?*

Wei Song took out a silk scroll from his sleeve and spoke. “Phoenix decree for Fu Rou.”

Fu Rou hurried to kneel.

Wei Song unrolled the phoenix decree. “Fu Rou shall be granted the title of Court Lady of the Six Offices. She shall manage the six offices and twenty-four departments.”

Fu Rou was stunned. She did not know what was going on.

“Court Lady Fu, accept the decree.” Wei Song delivered it to Fu Rou. Fu Rou had a bewildered look as she took the phoenix decree. She automatically kowtowed. However, she saw the two internal attendants walk over and came closer to the Imperial Grandson. She subconsciously picked the child up and adopted a protective stance.

Wei Song spoke, “Court Lady Fu. Relax, they won’t hurt the Imperial Grandson. Even if you don’t trust me, you should trust the phoenix stamp on the decree right?”

Fu Rou seemed to understand. “Was everything that happened just now a test?”

“Yes it was a test. On the day before the late Empress passed away, she was energetic and went to the Imperial Garden with Prince Qin. After she returned to Lizheng Palace, Her Majesty personally wrote down this phoenix decree. However, she did not release it immediately but left it with me. Her Majesty knew that you spoke for Consort Han out of justice and not because of your personal relationship with Han Mansion. She also knew that you have had numerous contradictions with the Eastern Palace. In the future, when the rumours and hardship occur, she wondered if you would be able to put aside all personal grudges and keep the bowl of water calm. Be it the Crown Prince, Prince Han or Prince Qin, they are all Her

Majesty's flesh and blood. The chief of the Court Lady Department has numerous female officials to manage and will be in contact with various princes and nobles. Court Lady Zhong is old and Her Majesty had to select a new chief that would not have any selfish motives. Court Lady Fu, what do you think?"

"I have no thoughts." She only wanted to do whatever duty was given to her and try whatever she could. She would not follow the crowd blindly and allow the national laws to be trampled on by those with selfish motives. They could not sacrifice lives just because they were not deemed important. "The six offices and twenty-four departments also do not have an opinion. The palace rules have long been established and no one's opinions can change them. The six offices just have to continue to function impartially without any opinions."

Wei Song was comforted as he bowed towards Fu Rou.

The Sheng Country was once again showing signs of betrayal. The Crown Prince and Prince Han competed with each other and eventually the Emperor chose Lu Yunji to lead the troops. He rejected Prince Han's recommendation of Sheng Chumu and also rejected the idea of Lu Yunji bringing his son along. Surprisingly, he suggested Du Ning to accompany the troops. Although his responsibilities were not much, he could directly write a memorial to the Emperor and inform the Emperor what was going on.

When Lu Yunji and Lu Qi returned home, they immediately started discussing.

"This Du person was clearly sent to keep an eye on you!" Lu Qi was fuming.

"Back then, I put my life on the line numerous times for the Emperor. I have no complaints nor regrets. Now, I am filled with old injuries and not worth much. I can even be thrown randomly into the imperial prison. When I am leading troops out, he even sent an accompanying troop to watch me. I have served him for my entire life. Does he think I am going to rebel at my old age?" Lu Yunji was

regretful.

“If he forces us like this, we will be forced to rebel sooner or later.”
Lu Qi spoke casually.

Lu Yunji reprimanded him. “You can’t say things like that!”

At this moment, Du Ning came to visit and asked someone for an invitation.

Lu Qi snorted, “He came really fast!”

“Du Ning is personally appointed by the Emperor. Although his rank isn’t high, we cannot offend him.” Lu Yunji knew his son’s temper and quickly shooed him away. “Go and do your thing. Don’t fume and glare here and make trouble for me.”

Du Ning followed behind Housekeeper Wu and walked into the garden. All of a sudden, he saw a beautiful image of a lady amongst the plum flower trees. She was carrying a child. However, her back view was extremely familiar. He halted in his steps, wanting to take a better look.

Housekeeper Wu turned back. “Official Lu?”

Du Ning replied, “The woman amongst the plum flower trees looks like...looks like my friend’s younger sister.”

Housekeeper Wu replied, “That lady is my Young Master’s concubine.”

Du Ning felt awkward. “I must have mistaken.” *Fu Yin would never be Lu Qi’s concubine.*

When Du Ning disappeared, Fu Yin walked out from within the plum flower trees. She looked depressed and guilty. She recognised Du Ning immediately but had no courage to face him. She had hurt him by shamelessly leaving without a word. She hoped that she would never see him again and he would eventually forget about her. She wished that he would find a wife that was a thousand times better than her and live a happy life.

“Why are you daydreaming about? What is there to see over there?”
Lu Qi suddenly hugged her from behind. “Let me take a look too.”

“Ah! You scared me!” Fu Yin turned around and was jittery because of her guilt. She stood in front of Lu Qi, blocking him from the view even though she knew Du Ning was not there anymore.

Lu Qi truly did not see anything as he took his child from her arms. “Good son, let your father hug you.” Meanwhile, he noticed that her expression was not good. “Are you okay?”

Fu Yin forced a smile. “I’m fine.”

“You look so pale” Lu Qi touched Fu Yin’s face affectionately as he grumbled at the child in his other arm. “It is all because of you. You are becoming heavier and making your mother tired.”

Fu Yin laughed, “What has that got to do with the child? Are you going to blame him for having a head?” Her tone changed. “Oh right, I heard that you have to go into battle again?”

Lu Qi returned to his arrogant tone. “So you are worried about this. Why? You can’t bear to be apart from me for a few days? You only know how to miss me when I am going into battle?”

“Who misses you? Go all you want. It won’t matter even if you go for one year.”

Lu Qi cried out, “An entire year? You wish. I won’t even leave for a single day. His Majesty said that since I have just become a father, I don’t have to go along with the army this time and can stay in Chang’an. On the other hand, Father has to lead the troops. He is extremely unlucky.”

Fu Yin did not know why she suddenly thought of Du Ning’s appearance. “Isn’t it a good thing to be the main commander? Why is it unlucky?”

“The Emperor assigned someone to accompany Father but the man is actually there to keep an eye on him.” Lu Qi’s tone suggested that he did not think anything of it. “However, Father has no need to be afraid of Du Ning.”

When Fu Yin heard Du Ning's name, she was shocked.

Lu Qi did not notice anything amiss. "If he is honest, then that is okay. But if he dares to hide anything, hnh! Out in camp, if the main commander wants you to die, all it takes is a single sentence."

"No!" Fu Yin shouted. However, as she saw Lu Qi assess her, she rushed to cover up. "You promised me that for Shan'er, you will do less evil deeds in future. Did you forget?"

"I remember. I was just kidding and you are already so scared. After all, he was appointed by the Emperor, why would we deal with him for no reason? He only has to worry if he is dishonest and forces us into the corner."

Fu Ying frowned. "But still..."

Their child suddenly started bawling and cut Fu Yin off.

Lu Qi coaxed their child while speaking, "I understand. I should not accumulate bad karma but instead collect good fortune for our son. Anyway, I am not leaving and will be accompanying you the whole time. That's enough, right?"

Lu Qi handed the crying child back to Fu Yin and saw that he immediately stopped crying. He mumbled to himself, "Little brat, you are still so young and you are already fighting against me for your mother..."

Fu Yin was distracted and wore a worried frown. She silently prayed to heaven to protect Du Ning.

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On this day, Fu Rou officially became a court lady. All the female officials from the Seamstress Department, the Siyan Department and the Rites Office admired her greatly. It made her feel that perhaps there was still hope in this place.

As she took up her new position, she immediately did two things to the Head of the Lateral Courts. The first was that when other departments came to the Lateral Courts to select female officials, they had to go by the rules and there was no need to submit a blacklist. Secondly, she ordered everyone to study the rules of the six offices. If anyone were to continue disobeying the rules and using their power to bully others, she would deal with them accordingly.

Fu Rou was unafraid that the Head of the Lateral Courts would think that she was taking revenge. If she had looked for every single one who treated her unfairly, she would be operating on selfish motives. However, the reason why she pointed out the head was fair. The Head of the Lateral Courts' failure and neglect of her duty was the reason why the Lateral Courts was so chaotic and the subordinates were undisciplined and arrogant.

When Fu Rou finally went through all the things from the various departments and offices, she lifted her head and realised that it was already late at night. She suddenly remembered Empress Zhangsun. *She was only handling matters regarding palace ladies and there was*

already so much to do. Empress Zhangsun had to manage the entire harem. No wonder she fell sick from exhaustion.

As Fu Rou thought of her, she unconsciously walked to Lizheng Palace. She remembered vividly the day that she had been dragged away. At that time, she even felt a strong hatred for this place. Now that she returned, she finally understood Empress Zhangsun's troubles and choices. No one is perfect. In her short life, Empress Zhangsun did all she could to be kind and beautiful; she was noble. Without going through what Empress Zhangsun had gone through, who was she to criticise or be disappointed. If she was a mother herself, she might not even be able to do what Empress Zhangsun did.

Without a female owner, Lizheng Palace lacked elegance and warmth. The cold wind blew past the seemingly barren ground. Fu Rou walked to the corner that Empress Zhangsun liked to read at. She did not expect that there would be someone there. Yet, it was also within expectations.

Fu Rou stepped up and greeted. "Your Majesty."

"You are here." He did not seem surprised to see Fu Rou wearing the third rank female official uniform. It was obvious that the Emperor had known about the Empress decree. "With the Empress gone, this place does not have any trace of warmth. When I walked in, my whole body felt cold. The Empress always said that you are someone who likes to read. Actually, isn't she someone that likes to read as well? Perhaps the reason why she felt that the both of you were fated is also because you both enjoyed reading."

"When Her Majesty was still alive, she was reading the History of Sui and Shi Ji. At times, she would read until late in the night. She was stubborn like that. Her health was not good yet she kept tiring herself out. Now, she has cruelly left me behind." Sorrow flooded out from the Emperor and he covered his face with his hands.

Fu Rou did not say anything as she stood by the side.

After a while, the Emperor calmed down as he stood up to walk out. "Court Lady Fu, come with me." Fu Rou followed.

“Now that the Empress is gone, someone needs to take care of the harem.” The Emperor needed advice. “What about Concubine Yan?”

Fu Rou remained silent.

“I have granted you the permission to speak and don’t intend to retract it. Tell me your thoughts.”

Fu Rou finally spoke up, “When the Empress was around, she once had Concubine Yan help her to manage the harem. Her Majesty said that Concubine Yan did her best. Unfortunately, Concubine Yan’s body is weak as well. When she helped the Empress set new palace rules, she even fell sick for a period. The Empress felt uneasy and never asked Concubine Yan for help after that.”

The Emperor nodded. “Concubine Yan is indeed frail.”

“Her Majesty’s health was not good. On top of that, she had to manage the harem and was always busy handling matters. She tired herself out, causing her illness to worsen. Eventually, she had to let go. Now, Concubine Yan’s body is not well either. If Your Majesty passes on the matters of the harem to Concubine Yan, I am afraid her body will not be able to take it.”

The Emperor hesitated, “However, Concubine Yan has the highest rank after the Empress. It will not seem right to hand matters over to someone else.”

“Her Majesty has just passed on and everyone in the harem is feeling anxious. For now, why don’t you assign someone with virtue and experience to temporarily take charge.” Fu Rou spoke under the Emperor’s encouraging gaze. “Imperial Concubine Wang. When the Grand Emperor was in power, Imperial Concubine Wang was in charge of the harem and ensured everything was in order. The Empress once told me that when she first took charge of the Six Offices, Imperial Concubine Wang gave her lots of advice. She was extremely grateful to Imperial Concubine Wang.”

The Emperor understood. “My mother passed away early. When I was still a prince, Imperial Concubine Wang took very good care of my mother. She even stood up for us in front of Imperial Father many

times. When she was in charge of the harem, she was very fair. Where is Imperial Concubine Wang now?"

Fu Rou answered, "After the Grand Emperor passed away, the imperial concubines without children all went to the temple. Imperial Concubine Wang is now staying at the temple."

"Imperial Concubine Wang once had a son. He was my fifth brother, Zhiyun. The previous Emperor loved him a lot. It was a pity that he got killed by Yin Shishi when he was fourteen. Imperial Concubine Wang served the previous emperor for many years and should be respected. Pass on my decree. Invite Imperial Concubine Wang back from the temple. Let Imperial Concubine Wang handle the harem matters. She is a senior and has a lot of experience. As for Concubine Yan, let her help to manage the Six Offices like she did in the past for the Empress. In this manner, Concubine Yan's health will not suffer and everyone will accept this arrangement. This is the best of both worlds."

The news spread like wind into Concubine Yan's palace.

Yu He reported, "His Majesty had intended to allow you to manage the harem. Unexpectedly, Fu Rou suddenly interfered and brought up Imperial Concubine Wang, messing up everything."

Concubine Yan stared up at the night sky for a long time. "As expected of the Empress. She is already buried underground yet she can cause me to be pricked by a thorn. Fu Rou, Court Lady of the Six Offices...I want to see how long this small chess piece that the Empress left behind can survive on the chessboard."

She had plotted for so long and cleared all the obstacles in her way. Even the huge mountain that was the Empress, has now been razed to the ground. Heavens was helping her. She did not believe that a mere third rank female official could defeat her.

Fu Rou brought Xiao Lu along with her as she arrived in Prince Qin's palace.

Because of Fu Rou's warning, the air in the Lateral Courts had stabilized. This time, everyone had a chance to be selected during the palace maid selection. Because Xiao Lu was literate and answered well, she had been chosen to join the twenty-four departments. Coincidentally, Shu'er hasn't been feeling well recently and Xiao Lu became her accompanying palace maid.

Prince Qin remembered Xiao Lu. This beautiful young palace maid helped Fu Rou carry a stool over, handed her books and served tea. She was extremely intelligent.

"Why is she here?" Prince Qin was curious.

"I asked Court Lady Fu to teach me how to read and Court Lady Fu agreed. Both Your Highness and I are Court Lady Fu's students." Seeing how Prince Qin was younger than her, Xiao Lu spoke casually.

Fu Rou corrected her, "Xiao Lu, you cannot speak in such a manner to His Highness." Following that, she explained to Prince Qin. "Xiao Lu has just been selected to join the twenty-four offices. From today, she will be following me."

Prince Qin smiled, "I quite like her temperament." He turned to Xiao Lu. "I am Teacher's senior disciple whereas you are Teacher's junior disciple. So am I your senior?"

Xiao Lu was dissatisfied. "But you are younger."

Prince Qin spoke as a matter of fact, "I am younger than you but I started learning before you. Call me Senior."

Xiao Lu replied, "Since we are studying, then we should establish seniority based on our knowledge."

Prince Qin was curious. "Aiya, you are a palace maid. You dare to compare knowledge with me?"

"In the palace, the hierarchy between the noble and lowly are already distinguished. Is there a need to differentiate between social hierarchy when learning as well? Why can't a palace maid compare knowledge with Your Highness? May I ask Your Highness, do you know the reason for wanting to gain knowledge?"

Xiao Lu's argument impressed Fu Rou. However, Fu Rou could not praise her. "Xiao Lu, you are behaving so boldly just because His Highness is kind. Hurry and apologise to His Highness."

Prince Qin waved his hand. "There is no need to apologise. Teacher, your new student is very good. She is much more interesting than the abiding palace maids around me."

He asked Xiao Lu "Then do you know the reason for seeking knowledge?"

Xiao Lu was confident. "Court Lady Fu has just taught this. Confucius said that there is nothing special about knowledge. It is simply obtaining what has been lost. Learning is just to live in a more relaxed way."

Prince Qin laughed, "So it's to live in a more relaxed way? Haha, listening to this indeed makes me happier."

Fu Rou laughed and shook her head. "You listen only to one sentence and think highly of yourself. You are even teaching others. Aren't you embarrassed? Don't fool around anymore, let me teach the both of you something."

Prince Qin pulled on Xiao Lu's sleeve and pointed to the seat beside him. Xiao Lu still understood the rules. "A palace maid cannot sit in front of a prince."

Prince Qin laughed, "Didn't you just say that when learning, there should not be any differentiation between social hierarchy? Are you afraid now?"

Xiao Lu immediately sat down beside Prince Qin and raised her brows at him in a provocative manner.

Looking at these two children bicker, Fu Rou's eyes were filled with humour. *Having a partner would help them learn better.*

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Sheng Chumu led a hundred troops on one of the mountains in the Restricted Area. They were galloping quickly, like fierce wind. They startled over a hundred birds and chased away another hundred beasts. He had brought a hundred men army to train on Cangshan Mountain previously. They were all capable and it would not be an exaggeration to say that each of them could take on one hundred men. The Emperor was delighted, and allowed them to train in the Restricted Area.

The Restricted Area was near to the palace's twenty-four offices. Outside stood the Wei River, while the palace was inside. The perimeter was about sixty kilometres. Within the circle, various kinds of plants and animals could be found. There were also all kinds of exercise fields. The two imperial armies, Shence Army and Yulin Army, were also stationed here. Not only was it for the royal couple's entertainment, they were also there for protection. One had to either be a royalty or a highly recognised general to enter the Restricted Area.

The hundred men were in high-spirits as they shouted repeatedly. They sped along, getting on and off their horses to shoot and train with their swords. They switched over easily and were no longer the weak lads they were before. However, as their instructor, Sheng Chumu did not show a hint of approval at all. The playboy back then, who could not even ride a horse properly, had trained so much that

his body was like steel. The sharp edges of his face were distinct as if they had been carved out with a knife.

As they neared the vegetable and fruits garden, Sheng Chumu suddenly caught sight of Fu Rou and subconsciously pulled on his reins.

“General, what is the matter?” Ye Qiulang stopped as well. He looked in the direction Sheng Chumu was looking. “Oh, that female official looks so imposing with the group of palace maids that she is leading. She is like you, General. She is pretty too.”

“Be careful or I will tell your Yan’er that your eyes are not faithful.” Sheng Chumu rolled his eyes at him.

“General, don’t. I am just saying.” Ye Qiulang immediately protested.

Sheng Chumu laughed, “Continue the training, I will catch up soon.”

Following that, Sheng Chumu appeared in front of Fu Rou, looking down from his horse.

The palace maid in charge of the vegetable and fruits garden greeted, “General Sheng, this is the newly appointed Court Lady...”

Sheng Chumu cut her off coldly, “There is no need to introduce us. We know each other.” His tone changed to a snarky one. “Court Lady Fu, congratulations on your promotion.”

Fu Rou instructed the palace maids, “Go to the garden and tell the chief to prepare the records of all the vegetables and fruits that were harvested.”

The palace maids left.

Fu Rou lifted her head to look at Sheng Chumu. Her eyes did not give anything away. “If you are unhappy, there is no need to pretend to congratulate. It sounds so insincere, don’t you feel uncomfortable saying it?”

Sheng Chumu got off his horse and took the chance to look away from her. “Nope.”

Fu Rou sighed, “Sheng Chumu, who are you angry with exactly?”

“You.” *Is there a need to ask?*

“You have found happiness elsewhere and like Lian Yan’er. How can you be angry with me?” *He did not even give her a chance to explain.*

“Liking Lian Yan’er and being angry with you are two entirely different things. I just want to like Lian Yan’er and be angry with you. Why? Court Lady of the Six Offices, are you going to punish me?” *How could she lift her head so highly in front of him?*

“Despicable.” She could not help but scold.

“Yes, I am despicable. I am not as noble as you. You nobly gained the Empress favour and attracted Prince Zhou. Everything is going your way and everyone likes you. You are noble and can watch happily by the side as my sister was forced to death.” As he spoke, his eyes burned with anger. He thought that no matter what, she would not stay out of it when his sister was in trouble.

“You are blaming Consort Han’s death on me?” She was being wronged by him all over. “When the Empress gave the order, I did not stay out of it, I was simply too powerless to do anything.”

“In a blink of an eye, a palace maid in the Lateral Courts became the leader of female officials. You even know how to do such a high level play. When you were by the Empress side, didn’t you have any ideas? Couldn’t you have sent a letter to my brother-in-law or me? Just a little warning and maybe my sister would still be alive.”

To think that he thought she was suffering in the Lateral Courts. He even went to look for Prince Qin and expose her location. Unexpectedly, her ability was beyond his imagination. “No, it is not that you were powerless. You were not willing to help.”

“Chumu, I...” She wanted to tell him the truth.

He cut her off coldly, “You say that you like me but you have actually given your heart to Prince Zhou. You don’t even care about me, why would you care if my sister lives? It was not easy for you to gain the Empress’ favour, why would you cut off your good fortune for

Consort Han? That's right, I like Lian Yan'er. Even though she used to be a prostitute, she is a hundred times better than someone like you who says one thing but means another and is greedy for power!"

She lifted her hand and slapped him hard. He did not care but got closer to her. His hand curled into a fist. He cornered her until she had nowhere else to back off to and was leaning against a huge tree. He raised his fist and saw her gaze waver, exposing a hint of fear.

That one punch, landed on the tree and caused all the remaining dried leaves to fall to the ground.

He stared at her. Pausing after every word, he spoke emotionlessly, "This will be the last time. The next time you dare to touch me, don't blame me for not having mercy."

She stared coldly for a moment before pushing him away. However, she tripped over the tree roots. He subconsciously reached out to help her but retracted his hand in the next second. She fell onto the ground and lifted her eyes to look at him angrily. He looked back at her. However, as he stared at her, his heart softened and he wanted to reach out to help her.

A hand cut in between the both of them. Prince Zhou had arrived.

"No thank you, Your Highness. I can stand up by myself." Fu Rou strained to stand.

"Let me send you back." Prince Zhou's gaze was soft.

"No need. I have things to do. I will take my leave first." She did not need to rely on either of these two men. She could move independently by herself.

Prince Zhou did not force her but simply glanced at Sheng Chumu.

Sheng Chumu stuck out his chin and looked challenging at him. "What do you have to teach me, Your Highness?"

"What is there to teach you? You are completely self-taught. You have done whatever I want you to do. You even did it better than I imagined." The corners of Prince Zhou's mouth turned up. "Thank

you.”

Sheng Chumu’s face changed and he looked ashen.

Du Ning was in the midst of writing a letter. He was rushing and his words were ugly. However, he did not care, he had to quickly send this letter to the Emperor.

He had gone with Lu Yunji to Sheng Country. Lu Yunji wanted to declare an outright battle whereas Du Ning wanted to hold peace talks. In his opinion, this rebellion is strange. He found several citizens that escaped and found out that this was because of rumours. The officials that were sent by the court to take over Ningwu County were even more shady than him. The citizens had then ganged up against them and the newly appointed official mistook it for a rebellion and forcefully subdued them. Things then got blown out of proportion and now the entire Sheng Country was in a mess.

Lu Yunji believed that Du Ning’s information was not accurate but decided to give him a chance. He asked Du Ning to discuss with the leader of the rebel army, Hong Ze. Unexpectedly, Hong Ze accepted the suggestion for peace talks and sent three ambassadors.

Lu Yunji’s motive this time was to take the attention off the Crown Prince and wash away his own crime. He wanted to return home victorious and strive for himself one last time. The meat that he had grown was right in front of him, and he could not let Du Ning ruin it. Therefore, he killed the ambassadors as soon as they arrived.

The fact that Lu Yunji dared to kill the ambassadors meant that he intended to kill Du Ning. At the critical juncture, Du Ning told Lu Yunji that the three ambassadors were not Hong Ze’s men but were people that he arranged to pretend to be ambassadors. Lu Yunji had always viewed him as a thorn and never shared any strategies with him. Du Ning had no choice but to use this method to test Lu Yunji. Du Ning then said that he was actually on the Crown Prince’s side.

Lu Yunji seemed to believe him and did not pursue the matter further. This was how Du Ning got the chance to write the letter.

When Du Ning finished writing, he instructed his close confidante to ensure that the letter was given to the Emperor. His confidante persuaded him to leave as well but Du Ning was determined to stay. *As soon as Lu Yunji realises that he is gone, Lu Yunji would go crazy and decide to gang up with Hong Ze to rebel. If that happens, Chang'an would be in danger.*

In the end, he still underestimated Lu Yunji's viciousness. When his confidante opened the door, he was immediately stabbed and fell right in front of Du Ning.

Lu Yunji walked in with no intentions of letting Du Ning go. "Official Lu, you said that you respect your teacher. However, you neglected to follow his instructions. Zhan Xuanzhi wanted you to protect the Crown Prince, yet you conspired and set up a trap for the person that the Crown Prince recommended. How can you face him?"

"I will always respect my teacher. As long as the Crown Prince and whoever he recommends do not do anything against Great Tang's interest, I will definitely do as my teacher says and do my best to protect the Crown Prince."

When he set out on this journey, he had bid goodbye to his parents and Sheng Chumu. He also bided farewell to Fu Yin, the person that he had held for a long time in his heart. There was no turning back. *Thankfully, when he is left all alone in this world, it was easy to embrace death.*

Lu Yunji chuckled sinisterly, "Against Great Tang's interest?"

"I am an official of Great Tang. My loyalty will be to Great Tang first." He finally understood. *Like what his teacher said, the chaos in the Sheng Country and Lu Yunji were all planned by the traitor in the Eastern Palace.*

"Very well. Official Lu, die for loyalty for Great Tang." Lu Yunji turned to leave.

A sword pierced through Du Ning's heart. Colour disappeared from his face. He left the last train of thought for his own selfish desire -- *Yin'er, you have to take care...*

I recommend stockpiling some chapters. Don't drop the novel, guys! You gotta see how things will turn around!!!

The misunderstandings will be cleared & Chumu and Fu Rou still loves each other. He just has a love hate relationship with her.

If you guys need a distraction, I recommend one of my translation projects! Here's a snippet:

So, although Le Yao Yao never had a boyfriend, she wasn't stupid enough to wonder what that "thing" was.

After all, she was no stranger to Prince Rui's bird. In fact, she already had a few hands-on experience with it. So now, Le Yao Yao couldn't even say good morning in response. Her face was boiling red.

Leng Jun Yu could tell why Le Yao Yao's expression was so stiff. He looked down at his bird that was currently poking Le Yao Yao.

Seeing this, Leng Jun Yu felt a bit awkward. But he was a man. This happens to guys all the time. He was no exception.

Plus, he was a normal man. It was natural he had sexual needs; not to mention that the person in his arms was someone he was attracted to.

Le Yao Yao's shy expression instantly turned him

on. He couldn't wait to devour her whole.

To be honest, this was something he had wanted to do for a very long time now.

While Leng Jun Yu was thinking of all this, Le Yao Yao kind of knew she was in danger. At this rate, she was going to be eaten without anything left!

So, she decided she had to get away from this dangerous man as soon as possible.

Unexpectedly, she was always slower than Leng Jun Yu. The moment she tried to move, Le Yao Yao was flipped over and pressed down by Leng Jun Yu.

“Uh..Yu...w-what do you want to do?”

Currently, Leng Jun Yu's arms were on her shoulders. Although his upper body wasn't touching her, his lower body was tightly pressed against hers.

Le Yao Yao could feel the King of Hell's bird accurately poking her lower body.

Le Yao Yao felt a blast of hot air attacking her face. They were in such sexual positions. Although they were still wearing clothes, she could feel the heat of the bird nonetheless.

Oh God! The heat was transferring onto her!

“This Prince is already like this. What do you think this Prince wants to do?” Leng Jun Yu seductively slurred.

Then, he deliberately poked his bird a few times in between her legs.

It was rock hard. Le Yao Yao began to freak out like mad.

If you enjoy that, check out the novel [here!](#) (There are lots of jade bunnies, plucking the radish, big bird, perky raisins and etc. Just don't drop Court Lady!!!) **YOU GOTTA HANG IN THERE!!**

Court Lady

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Fu Yin had prepared a ribs soup and brought it to the study room. These days, Lu Qi has brought her to many interesting places in Chang'an and she started to feel that perhaps she could be happy too.

All of a sudden, a voice floated out of the study room. "Du Ning actually tried to set my father up?"

"Don't look at him like he is just a scholar. He is quite bold. Not only did he send his own subordinates to pretend to be ambassadors from the rebel troops to test General Lu, he even used his teacher's name to deceive General Lu. If not for General Lu's vast experience allowing him to see through his plan, I am afraid that that letter signalling disaster for Duke Chen Residence would have landed on the Emperor's table already."

"How did Father deal with it?"

"Is there a need to ask? General immediately made the decision and..." his voice suddenly paused. "To others, they said that assassins from the rebel army did it."

"Good." Lu Qi sounded unhappy. "He dares to go against us. Du Ning deserves to die without a complete corpse..."

Du Ning is dead?! Fu Yin covered her mouth and did not care about the tray that fell from her hands. The bowl shattered and the soup

spilled all over.

Lu Qi dashed out from the room and saw Fu Yin's disheveled look and the mess on the ground. He thought that she had scalded herself and asked in concern, "Did you burn yourself?"

Fu Yin recovered and swiped Lu Qi's hand off. She glared at him with a hateful look. "You guys killed him."

Lu Qi seemed to realise something was off. "Who?"

Fu Yin repeated, "You guys killed him..."

"Killed who?" Lu Qi glanced at his subordinate and signalled for him to leave. His face then fell. "You eavesdropped on our conversation?"

She suddenly pounced on him and started hitting him. "You guys killed Du Ning! You all killed him!"

He grabbed her hand and looked at her suspiciously. "How do you know Du Ning?"

"You guys killed Du Ning! Murderer..." She hated herself. *Why wasn't she determined? How could she think that she could be happy with this kind of person?*

"You are all murderers!" *She had known that the Lu father and son were not good people. Their hands were stained with blood. However, just because Lu Qi treated her sincerely, she was fooled into thinking that he had changed.*

"Because of a stupid man, you are going against me? When did you go behind my back and fool around with the Lu guy? Tell me!" *He had given her a chance and all he got in return was betrayal?*

"That's right, I fooled around with other guys. Even before I met you, I was already with Du Ning."

She was supposed to marry Du Ning. Perhaps if she had married him, she would have been able to stop him from going on this trip. Then Du Ning would not have died because of this father and son pair.

Lu Qi was shocked. "What did you say?"

Fu Yin shouted, "Du Ning taught me to write and draw. We loved each other and have pledged our love to each other. My biggest wish is to be his wife. He is the person that I truly love."

Lu Qi was furious. "Shut up!"

"No. I am going to tell you everything. Do you know why I left Du Ning to come to you? Because I wanted revenge. I want to take revenge for my mother. She was the third lady from the Fu family. Do you remember the Fu family from Guangzhou? You instructed people to burn the entire residence. That night, a woman was burned to death. She was my mother. You killed my mother and you are my enemy!"

She had given up. A superficial love and superficial happiness had caused her to worry too much about gaining and losing.

Lu Qi was truly stunned. "Yin'er..."

"My name is not Yin'er, my surname is Fu. I am the Fu family's fourth daughter. My name is Fu Yin." She was going to be herself once again. The first thing she had to do was to admit her past.

"Stop talking. Don't say a single word." Lu Qi could not accept this.

"You thought that you're so smart but actually you are extremely stupid. The reason I stayed by your side is for revenge yet you never even realised. Lu Hanxing started the fire so I killed him. I never thought that you would actually cover up for me in front of your father. That's right! And I was the one that burned the letter informing you that Hong Yide was captured by Yan Zifang... not Mo Li!"

"Stop talking! Shut up! You are not allowed to speak!" Right from the beginning, he felt like she was different from others. So what seemed like her shy and quiet side was actually her covering up her hatred.

"Every day when I open my eyes, I am waiting to see your Duke Chen Residence get destroyed!" Du Ning's death has caused all the guilt in Fu Yin to pour out like a flood. She was brutal with her words.

Lu Qi suddenly grabbed Fu Yin's arms and pulled her back into the house. He took their child and locked the door.

His son was shocked and started bawling. Lu Qi hugged his son tightly and placed his cheek against his son's face, crying silently.

He finally understood that they could never be happy together. He was willing to tear out his heart and guts to see her smile. However, his hands were stained with her mother's blood and Du Ning's blood. Her smiles were like cactus flowers and were short-lived.

On this day, Sun Lingshu met Sheng Chujun.

The reason for this was because Fu Shui gave a fast horse to the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince was anxious to show off his riding abilities and rode too roughly, causing the horse to lose control and charge towards Sun Lingshu. Luckily, Sheng Chujun saved her.

Sheng Chujun sent Sun Lingshu back to the palace. Sun Lingshu had mixed emotions and did not know what to say. All of a sudden she saw a hairpin poking out from his breast pocket.

She could not help but comment, "This...looks like Lingwei's purple sparrow hairpin."

Sheng Chujun lowered his head and retrieved the hairpin. He stared deeply at it.

"That is my sister's favourite hairpin. On the day of the Crown Princess Selection, Father brought me to Han Mansion to attend the selection. Before we left, Lingwei gave me her hairpin and told me to wear it. She said that if I wore it, I would definitely become the Crown Princess. Perhaps it was because of her blessing that I managed to defeat Lu Yingying and gain the Crown Prince's favour..." Sun Lingshu suddenly could not continue as sorrow flooded her eyes. "Lingwei came to the Eastern Palace to beg me not to marry her off to Lu Qi. Was it because of you?"

Sheng Chujun acknowledged.

“Do you like her?” He kept the hairpin with him at all times. She could see that his love was genuine.

Sheng Chujun replied, “Yes.”

“Did she like you?” She was asking the obvious once again.

Sheng Chujun nodded. “She did.”

“Very good. My pitiful sister. At least she managed to have a taste of reciprocated love before she passed on.” Sun Lingshu stepped into her palace.

Sheng Chujun suddenly said, “On the night that Lingwei was poisoned by arsenic, I had snuck into her room to meet with her.”

Sun Lingshu immediately halted and listened attentively.

“She was as happy as a sparrow that had been freed because you had agreed to help her and she would not be forced to marry Lu Qi. We had a chance of being together. Crown Princess, I am grateful for you. Thank you for showing her sisterly love during her most helpless period. Thank you for helping and promising her. You allowed Lingwei’s last moment to be filled with happiness.”

Sun Lingshu paused for a moment. “Speaking of which, I haven’t thanked you for saving me today.”

“You are the sister that Lingwei respected the most. In the past, I could not protect Lingwei. From now on, I will protect you. Even if it costs me my life, I will not allow the evil person that killed Lingwei to hurt you.” Sheng Chujun expressed his determination sincerely.

Sun Lingshu did not turn back as she walked in. “Thank you.”

Shuangxi smiled at Sheng Chujun before rushing to catch up with Sun Lingshu. As she saw the Crown Princess’ side view, she could not help but fall in a daze. At this very moment, Sun Lingshu’s expression was not one of having been moved but her expression was icy cold.

Shuangxi suddenly recalled an incident in which a palace maid got sentenced to death by the Empress for bringing in arsenic for rats. Because

of that, Sun Lingshu had instructed Shuangxi to hide their small pack of arsenic well. However, two days ago, Guiyuan had come to bid farewell and Shuangxi had wanted to ask her to take the arsenic out of the palace. However, Shuangxi could not find the arsenic. She then recalled that Sun Lingshu had been having a series of bad dreams recently. During her nightmares, she would always shout "Don't look for me." Shuangxi had thought that it was Consort Han's soul that was haunting her. However, if Consort Han had killed the Second Miss, Consort Han would have gone to hell. Why would she still remain in the human realm? But if it was the Second Miss that was calling out her grievance, she should be after Prince Han. Why would she look for the Crown Princess?

Shuangxi did not know why her heart suddenly fell.

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Yan Zifang arrived at Grand Prince Liang's garden. Normally, he would hear noises from Grand Prince Liang drinking and playing with ladies. However, today's scene caused him to freeze.

Lu Yingying was helping Grand Prince Liang to dress his wound while Grand Prince Liang sat quietly. At times, he would even sneak a glance at her composed face with a peaceful expression.

"Your Highness, you can be open." Lu Yingying had noticed. "I am your wife. If you want to look at me, you can look openly."

"Oh right." Grand Prince Liang changed to look at her confidently. He noticed a leaf on her hair and reached out to gently brush it away.

Yan Zifang could not stand to watch any longer as he took big strides in. Lu Yingying got up. "Your Highness, your injury has been taken care of."

Grand Prince Liang was satisfied and proceeded to remind her, "Remember to come and help me change the dressing tomorrow."

Lu Yingying spoke honestly, "The imperial physician said that your wound has almost healed and there is no need to change the dressing. Tomorrow, the bandage can be taken off."

Grand Prince Liang was not at all awkward. "What do those quacks

know? I want you to change it so you shall change it. Come early tomorrow morning, if you are late I will be angry.”

Lu Yingying promised and turned to leave.

Grand Prince Liang's gaze was fixated on Lu Yingying and he did not realise that Yan Zifang's gaze was also on his wife. When Lu Yingying's figure completely disappeared, Grand Prince Liang then asked, “Yan Zifang, when did you come?”

Yan Zifang's voice rose slightly, “I have been here for a while. However, I saw that the two of you were talking and did not want to interrupt so I did not say anything.”

Grand Prince Liang raised his brows. “Look at how sour you sound. It is not that I want to nag at you but you are not young anymore, you should get a wife. It doesn't matter how you play on the outside but when you return home, you should have a wife to serve you. Everyone says that a man becomes more earnest after he has settled down, just like me...”

Yan Zifang cut him off, “Your Highness, I came today because I heard something that could be disadvantageous for you.”

As soon as Grand Prince Liang heard the word ‘disadvantageous’, he could not be bothered with Yan Zifang's attitude. “What news?”

Yan Zifang replied, “You Jianming intends on appealing to the Emperor to send you to Liangzhou.”

In reality, whatever Yan Zifang asked You Jianming to do, You Jianming would do. Just like the previous time when You Jianming appealed to the Emperor to abdicate the Crown Prince. The Iron Mask Imperial Censure had turned into a puppet in his hands.

Grand Prince Liang was furious. “Was he not satisfied after trying to abdicate the Crown Prince? Now he is creating trouble for me. Hurry and help me find out where that person is.”

Yan Zifang smiled. “At this time, he should be returning home.”

Grand Prince Liang shot up. “Men, let's go and search a house!”

Yan Zifang held back a smile as a mysterious look overcame him. Lu Yingying did not allow him to kill Grand Prince Liang so he shall chase him out of Chang'an. If something happens on the journey and he dies, Lu Yingying will not have any proof and cannot blame him.

In the silence of the night, Sheng Chumu chose a few of his most outstanding soldiers from his army of a hundred. Ye Qiulang, who was considered a veteran soldier, was amongst them as well as the newly joined, Zong Jianxiu. They silently made their way into a farm on the outskirts.

He had received news that Zhan Xuanzhi's murderer, Mao Shouping, was hiding here. He wanted to capture him alive as proof to who had instigated the murder, although all the signs were already pointing to the Crown Prince. All of a sudden, a patrol group appeared out of nowhere and found them. Although Sheng Chumu's group managed to subdue them quickly, they did not manage to stop them from warning others.

Mao Shouping intended to escape by jumping out of the window. However, under Sheng Chumu's orders, Ye Qiulang and Zong Jianxiu blocked the back exit. Without saying anything more, the two of them quickly place a sack over Mao Shouping's head. They tied him up and brought him away.

Everyone gathered outside the house. Ye Qiulang was delighted. "General, we got him. He is alive."

Sheng Chumu gave the order to return when all of a sudden, they heard a *puu* sound. An arrow stuck onto the bag.

"A hidden archer!" Sheng Chumu warned. Following that, he whirled around and kicked away another arrow. He then accurately determined where the arrows were being shot from and automatically chased after them.

Even if this person was not the instigator, they would be close to the instigator. Unfortunately, the sky was too dark and the territory was complex. When he chased up until the tree, that person had already

disappeared without a trace and Mao Shouping had been silenced.

Sheng Chumu returned to Han Mansion and informed Prince Han of this bad news.

Prince Han paced back and forth. However, he eventually sat down after a few steps due to his overweight self. He drank a cup of tea. "Without a live witness, we are unable to get an oral confession. Even if we bring him to Imperial Father, we will not be able to take down the Crown Prince. It seems like he has managed to escape this time."

Sheng Chumu spoke in a low voice, "No one can run from the long arm of law, he will be punished eventually."

Prince Han, however, shook his head. "He has been the Crown Prince for many years and has built up power in court. It will not be easy to make him get the punishment he deserves."

Sheng Chumu already had a plan. "No matter how powerful the Crown Prince is, he is not as powerful as the Emperor. Brother-in-law, you have to think of a way to get the Emperor's support."

Prince Han asked, "How?"

Sheng Chumu gave him an idea. "Everything needs to be nurtured and a father son relationship is no exception. The longer you stay in front of the Emperor, the more he will care about you. You have to try to spend time with the Emperor. The best would be to spend time out of court."

Internal attendants rushed in and reported that the Emperor had fainted. Prince Han was startled as he rushed to enter the palace.

Sheng Chumu pondered, "Go ahead. I am going home to find my father. Let him support you."

Prince Han made an *ah* sound. "What is there to support? I am much storkier than your father."

Sheng Chumu rolled his eyes and walked away. *He did not know how the Crown Prince even thought that his chubby brother-in-law would covet the Crown Prince's position. From his long years of observing Prince Han,*

all he liked to do was eat. Of course, when his sister was still around, she would be his top priority.

As he thought of his elder sister, Sheng Chumu's heart clenched. He will get revenge. However, before he got his revenge, he was going to find out what exactly had happened and determine who was at fault.

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When the Emperor woke up, he saw Prince Han and Sheng Xiaojing kneeling in front of his bed.

Prince Han leaned on the bed. “Imperial Father, I heard that you fainted and I was so scared. Imperial Mother has already left me, you cannot leave me behind.”

The Emperor sighed, “Your Imperial Mother left before me and missed seeing the big changes happening to this country. She is actually lucky. Grand Prince Liang is creating trouble again. He actually brought people to silence and beat up You Jianming, an Imperial Censor. If it was just that, I could have just sent him to the feudal land. However, the member of the Ministry of Revenue, Du Ning, whom I had sent to gain experience in the Sheng Country, has also been killed by assassins from the Sheng Country. Did you all hear about it?” The urgent news from Lu Yunji had been delivered by the Crown Prince.

Prince Han and Sheng Xiaojing nodded at the same time. The Emperor asked, “What are your thoughts?”

“I believe that this situation was definitely...” Prince Han almost blurted out the Crown Prince’s name.

Sheng Xiaojing nudged Prince Han lightly.

Prince Han altered his sentence. "This...was...was definitely a pity. Du Ning is a smart young man. If not for the assassin, in a few more years, he would have been a valuable asset to Great Tang."

The Emperor was in deep thought. "Yes, what a pity. Young men can be smart but they must know how to conceal their talents and abide by time so as to protect themselves. If they are dead, what future do they have? Sheng Xiaojing, when you were younger, you had ample spirit as well. However, you were luckier than Du Ning and could always escape death. If you died back then, how would you have obtained your title Duke Lu, a famous general of your generation?"

"The reason why I was able to live for so long and make a name for myself is because of Your Majesty's grace." *If he landed into the hands of someone like Lu Yunji, it would have been hard for him to live as well. Therefore, he chose to highlight the importance of a brilliant ruler.* "I am extremely grateful to Your Majesty. Even if I had ten mouths, I won't be able to finish saying what I am grateful for."

"No one can escape the effects of ageing. Those that fought for the world with me have all grown old and are slowly dying. Every year, more and more passes away. Today, there are only you, Lu Yunji and a few others left. I awarded both of you with feudal nobility, money and supported your sons because I haven't forgotten the contributions from the both of you. I hope that all my ministers could have a good life. The most difficult thing on earth is to finish what one has started. I only hope that you all can understand my efforts and work together with me." *However, it is not enough to just hope.*

Sheng Xiaojing replied, "Your Majesty's benevolence has moved the world. Although I am old, I will still go to battle with anyone that dares to betray Your Majesty. I will take down the heads of those ungrateful people."

Prince Han wore a crying face. "Imperial Father, your body isn't well and you just woke up, you cannot be agitated. As soon as a person is agitated, it is easy for their illness to relapse."

The Emperor saw his son's earnest and concerned look and felt consoled. "This old father of yours will not die just yet."

“Why is it that the more you say, the more worried I become?” Prince Han thought of Sheng Chumu as he saw Sheng Xiaojing. He then thought of Sheng Chumu’s suggestion. “Imperial Father, I have something that I hope you can promise me. Please allow me to stay in the palace for a while to serve you medicine. Let me express my filial piety.”

“You have been staying in the Han Mansion and are used to your freedom. If you enter the palace, you will face restrictions.” *Actually, Prince Han was someone that could make him happy.* “I don’t want you to be tired.”

Prince Han persisted, “I am doing my filial duty, no matter how tired I become, I am willing.”

“Your Majesty, no matter how well other people serve you, they will never be as considerate as your own son.” Sheng Xiaojing demonstrated his support for Prince Han. “Your Majesty should just agree to it.”

The Emperor was deep in thought. “Filial piety is the first amongst all good things. I cannot let Prince Han’s filial side down. Move in then. But where should Prince Han stay?”

Chief Cao caught the Emperor’s gaze and replied that Wude Palace was currently unoccupied.

“It is a good place. It is suitable for Prince Han to stay.” The Emperor gave permission.

Prince Han smiled.

When the Crown Prince and Du He returned to the Eastern Palace, Fu Shui and Sheng Chujun greeted them. All four of them wore grim expressions.

Fu Shui was the first to ask, “Your Highness, how is His Majesty?”

Du He snorted, “His Majesty is great but Prince Han is even better. The Emperor has allowed Prince Han to stay in Wude Palace. He was

even conferred the title of Left Wuhou General and will be leading the Yong City Government. As the Yong City Official, he will be the senior official that manages the entire Chang'an. Once this position is stable, the entire Chang'an will be in Prince Han's hands."

The Crown Prince massaged his eyebrows. "Imperial Father has always favoured Prince Han. Now that Imperial Mother is no longer around, who else will speak up for me." Only after his Imperial Mother passed away, did he regret being stubborn towards her. "What about you? Why are you so anxious?"

Fu Shui replied, "Sheng Chumu has captured Mao Shouping. Although I shot an arrow, it exposed my position and I was not able to determine if Mao Shouping is still alive."

The Crown Prince frowned even deeper.

Fu Shui saw how the Crown Prince turned silent. "As long as Mao Shouping is still alive, Prince Han will be able to ask what happened with Zhan Xuanzhi. He can then use this issue to create trouble in front of the Emperor. A huge disaster is about to happen. Your Highness, you have to make a move."

The Crown Prince laughed helplessly, "How can I make a move? It is not like I can kill him."

A cold gaze flitted through Fu Shui's eyes. "Why not?"

Everyone was stunned. Fu Shui lowered his voice, "Wude Palace is just outside of Eastern Palace. The wolves are already pacing around. Your Highness, your sword has to be sharp."

The Crown Prince was extremely hesitant. Fu Shui persisted, "The person who strikes first will have an advantage. Do we have any other choice?"

Sheng Chujun suddenly spoke, "Prince Han killed my sister and Lingwei. He should have paid for his life."

Du He looked distressed. "Prince Han is no ordinary person, if we want to kill him..."

The Crown Prince suddenly placed his finger on his lips as he looked to the left and right in alarm. He lowered his voice, "Let's talk in the study."

Everyone headed into the Crown Prince's study room.

The net had been spread open for a while. It was time to reel in the net.

On this day, Imperial Concubine Wang held a banquet. Grand Prince Liang and his consort were invited to enter the palace. However, both Grand Prince Liang and Lu Yingying walked separately.

Grand Prince Liang had developed some good feelings towards Lu Yingying. However, when he tried to get close to her yesterday, she avoided him and his embarrassment turned into anger. He knew that she had rejected him because of the person in her heart. This made him even angrier. However, he did not know that this feeling was already considered jealousy because no matter how angry he was, he did not hurt her at all. Now, he could not bear to injure her.

Lu Yingying felt that she deserved it but she could not betray her true feelings and pretend to be nice to Grand Prince Liang. She stuck to her true self and accepted the consequence whether it was good or bad. Her view of Grand Prince Liang changed as well. She felt like he was a spoiled child. Because of the Grand Emperor and the fact that he was the brother of the Emperor, he had no true friends. Therefore, he would always fight for what he wanted. The more he could not get the person he liked, he would simply give up being kind. However, deep in his heart, he knew the basics of behaving. If people treated him well, he would treat them well, even if his way of demonstrating it was slightly awkward.

Fu Rou walked towards her and saw that Lu Yingying was looking a lot better than before. Fu Rou felt assured. "Consort Liang."

Lu Yingying recalled the small clash that they had previously but smartly decided not to bring it up. "Court Lady Fu, it has been long. The banquet has yet to start. Would you like to have a chat with me?"

Fu Rou turned. "Let me lead the way."

They walked one in front of the other. Lu Yingying spoke first, "Grand Prince Liang has angered the Emperor and is worried of being sent out of Chang'an, do you have any idea as to how to help him?"

"You want to help Grand Prince Liang share his worries?" Fu Rou was surprised.

Lu Yingying nodded.

"The first time I saw you, I thought you were a spoiled noble lady. Later on, I realised that you were a good person. You helped me send the message to Chen Ji without asking for more. After that, you even saved me from the house in the forest. After you became Consort Liang, I saw that you grew skinnier and could tell that Grand Prince Liang was not treating you well. However, you are worried for him now." *Each time, she made Fu Rou see her in a different light.*

"Everyone is innately kind and gentle. No matter how evil someone is, there are times when they are nice." Lu Yingying remembered the good side of people.

Fu Rou was curious. "Have you ever hated and wished misfortune on someone?"

Lu Yingying thought of Yan Zifang. "Maybe I have hated someone. But I do not wish for misfortune to befall them. I just want them to be safe."

Fu Rou could not help but laugh. "All the kindness in Duke Chen Residence is concentrated in you."

Lu Yingying pouted slightly. "Why are you laughing? You shouldn't be laughing at me. Look at this world, look at Chang'an and the Royal Palace. If everyone were the same, only caring about calculating their gains and losses, thinking about revenge, scheming to climb up, how scary would it be? There should be different kinds of people. More people like you, who are attentive to details and won't step over others. More good people like me and the world would be more wonderful."

“I highly agree with that.”

Lu Yingying turned serious again. “So do you have any way to help Grand Prince Liang out?”

Fu Rou thought for a moment. “Rather than saying it as helping Grand Prince Liang overcome this difficulty, how about finding Grand Prince Liang a new backing in the palace?”

Lu Yingying understood. “Are you referring to Imperial Concubine Wang? Will she be willing to speak up for Grand Prince Liang?”

Fu Rou was very confident. “As long as Grand Prince Liang helps Imperial Concubine Wang do one thing, Imperial Concubine Wang will definitely look at Grand Prince Liang differently.” She leaned in and whispered into Lu Yingying’s ear.

Delight shone on Lu Yingying’s face. “That is a good idea. You have helped us greatly this time.”

“I can only help him this one time. What about you? Do you intend to be his good wife from now on? Grand Prince Liang creates the most trouble. Can you always help clean up after him?” Fu Rou has seen Grand Prince Liang’s troublemaker side before.

Lu Yingying had no complaints. “I will help him however much I can. Since we are already husband and wife, I have to share hardships with him and live and die together.”

Fu Rou left first as she had something to do. Lu Yingying strolled back by herself. There had been a heavy snowfall a few days ago and the wintersweet flowers in Fu An Palace were emitting a beautiful and alluring scent. All of a sudden, a shadow across the flowers.

“Your Highness, I know that it is you. Come on out.” Lu Yingying had known that Grand Prince Liang was hiding behind a tree.

Grand Prince Liang was slightly awkward as he walked out. However, he lightly held onto Lu Yingying’s hand. Lu Yingying’s hand froze but she allowed him to hold onto her.

Grand Prince Liang did not look at Lu Yingying but kept his eyes

focused in front of him. "You are my consort but you don't allow me to get close to you. It is only natural that I get angry with you. However, since I am magnanimous, I have decided...decided..." He suddenly fell silent.

"What have you decided? Lu Yingying asked.

Grand Prince Liang halted and turned his head. He asked seriously, "Other men can find the women they truly love. As a prince, why don't I have this blessing?"

"Because in order to gain another person's heart, you first have to show your sincerity."

"What if I have shown my sincerity but I still cannot get the woman I like to forget about another man and think only of me?" Grand Prince Liang never thought that he would need courage in his lifetime.

"I don't know." Lu Yingying did not want to lie. Grand Prince Liang's eyebrows creased before relaxing. He then said stiffly, "Good."

Lu Yingying froze. "What is good?"

"It is better than getting rejected by you." Grand Prince Liang held onto Lu Yingying's hand. "What good idea did Court Lady Fu give you?"

Lu Yingying laughed lightly, "So you were eavesdropping on us?" *If time goes by, would she like him?*

Grand Prince Liang was obstinate. "Who is eavesdropping? I happened to pass by. Quick tell me. What idea?"

As the two of them talked, they walked towards the main palace. The light fragrance of plum flowers that came after the bitter cold surrounded the air.

Court Lady

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Fu Rou left the palace to visit her family. Unexpectedly, Yan Zifang came up to her as soon as she left the palace. Fu Rou spoke coldly, "What do you want now?" She thought that he had thought things through after he left her alone for a period.

Yan Zifang laughed bitterly, "After looking around, you're the only person that can accompany me while I drown my sorrows in this foreign city." He then turned to leave.

Fu Rou thought about it and eventually followed him into a wine house.

Yan Zifang poured himself a drink and downed it. Fu Rou suddenly understood. His troubles with love had nothing to do with her this time. She finally breathed a sigh of relief. She had said whatever needed to be said, if he still persisted, she would have to cut him off. However, he was a good older brother to her when they were children and she had already lost him once.

Yan Zifang drank another cup. "It seems like I am always struggling with love. Back then when you fell for Sheng Chumu and disregarded our engagement, I was depressed for a long time."

"What you were trying to catch was the illusion that was created from spending a long time out in the ocean." As long as they resolved their engagement issue, she did not mind being friends with him.

“But who are you drinking for today?”

Yan Zifang drank cup after cup. “I am not drinking for anyone.”

Fu Rou had no choice but to point out. “For Consort Liang?”

Yan Zifang’s face fell. “Don’t call her that. She has her own name.”

“So I am right.” Fu Rou had no intentions of digging out the secrets between the two of them. “Something that was obtained from nothing is not worth cherishing. Only when it is lost will men then understand what it means to them. Isn’t that right?”

Yan Zifang spoke fiercely, “A failure like Grand Prince Liang is not worthy of having her. But I don’t understand why she would help him? He was going to be banished to the feudal land. I had arranged everything to help her get rid of him and she would have nothing to worry about!”

Last night, during Imperial Concubine Wang’s banquet, Grand Prince Liang suggested adopting a child for Zhiyun. As Zhiyun’s mother, Imperial Concubine Wang was extremely moved. Lu Yingying then took the chance to mention that Grand Prince Liang was about to leave Chang’an. Thereafter, Imperial Concubine Wang then spoke to the Emperor for Grand Prince Liang. The Emperor promised to give Grand Prince Liang another chance.

Fu Rou was shocked. “Yan Zifang, you were a pirate and will always be a pirate. Before Lu Yingying was married, you did not care. Now that she is married and wants to stay by Grand Prince Liang’s side, you start to become greedy. Do you know how troubled she was because of Grand Prince Liang’s issue?”

Yan Zifang slammed the cup on the table. “What troubles? He abuses her! He doesn’t treat her like a person! Grand Prince Liang is not worthy of her!”

“Then what about you? Do you have the right?” Fu Rou’s tone was sharp. “You always hate it when people bring up your pirate background and think that they are looking down on you. But have you thought about it? It is not where you come from but the way you

behave. You mix right and wrong and do not follow the rules. You don't care about how others think, you are uncivilised and unreasonable. You force your view onto others and that is why other people look at you differently. You said you came on land to become an official because I looked down on you as a pirate. You asked me why I still look down on you. But up until now, you are still a selfish pirate. In order to reach your goal, you will do anything, regardless if it's right or wrong."

Yan Zifang's eyes slowly turned frigid.

"This is the real reason why you lost her. Not because of anyone else but yourself." Fu Rou drew blood on the first prick.

"Court Lady of the Six Offices, you are getting sharper as you speak. Why? Sheng Chumu doesn't want you and in a fit of anger, you are treating all men on earth as enemies?" Yan Zifang was not drunk but grew courageous from his drinks. More importantly, he did not want to admit that she was right.

"Drink your wine. Speak any more nonsense and I am afraid there won't be anyone left for you to drown your sorrows with in the entire Chang'an." Fu Rou picked up a cup. She took a sip before drinking the entire cup.

Sigh, Yan Zifang was also the only friend she had to drink with.

After night fell, Sheng Chumu came to an inn.

There were quite a few customers drinking in the main hall on the first floor. He walked past silently and headed up the stairs. He entered a guest room. In the room, there was a round table and small dishes of food, a jar of wine and two cups were set upon it. One cup was already filled and the food had been touched.

Sheng Chumu was not surprised as he sat down and poured himself a cup.

A person walked out from within the room, holding a candle in his hand. He placed it on a candle holder by the window and sat in front

of Sheng Chumu. He picked up a mouthful of vegetables and drank a sip of wine. He then wiped his mouth with his sleeves.

“They have decided to take action?” Sheng Chumu asked.

“Yes. On the ninth of this month, they will kill him on his way back to the Han Mansion. Jisun Chenxin will be leading the group.” The candlelight lit up the room and the person’s face. It was the third son of the Sheng family, Sheng Chujun.

The three brothers from the Sheng family had put on a show to deceive their enemies. They all believed that their sister and Prince Han would never poison the jujube cake. Hence, the person that placed the poison could only be from the Eastern Palace. In order to find out the truth, Sheng Chujun pretended to fight with his two older brothers and join the Crown Prince.

“The ninth?” Something shifted in Sheng Chumu. “Isn’t that tomorrow?”

“The Eastern Palace does not know that Mao Shouping is already dead and is worried that he will tell the truth about Zhan Xuanzhi’s murder. Hence, they are extremely anxious. The Crown Prince has decided to kill the brat, Prince Han, and get rid of the stump in his heart.”

Sheng Chumu laughed. “The brat, Prince Han? He is called Brother-in-law.”

Sheng Chujun pursed his lips. “I have gotten used to calling him that in the Eastern Palace. With the Crown Prince, I call him whatever they call him.”

Sheng Chumu felt guilty. “Chujun, this has been difficult on you.”

Sheng Chujun shook his head and took out a map. “They will attack here. Jisun Chenxin will be leading two-hundred suicide troops with the goal of taking Brother-in-law’s head. Some of the guards in Han Mansion have been bribed. When the Eastern Palace takes actions, they will change sides. This is the list of the betrayers.”

Sheng Chumu was concerned. “Have you found out who was the one

that put poison in the jujube cakes?”

Sheng Chujun shook his head. “Not yet. Initially, I suspected the Crown Prince. However, seeing how angry he is about this, it seems like he really believes that Prince Han wanted to poison him. If it wasn’t the Crown Prince, then who would have done it?”

“Don’t think too much. After we expose their plot to kill Brother-in-law tomorrow, the Crown Prince will not be able to protect his position. We can then dig out all the secrets in the Eastern Palace.” Sheng Chumu got up, everything was imminent. “From this moment on, you don’t have to go to the Eastern Palace, that place is too dangerous.”

Sheng Chujun agreed and recalled, “Elder Brother, I need you to do something for me. I also need you to talk to Brother-in-law. When the Eastern Palace falls, everyone will be unlucky but please do not make things difficult for the Crown Princess.”

Sheng Chumu understood. “Because of her?”

Sheng Chujun replied, “Lingwei was always very protective of her sister. If the Crown Princess has a tragic ending, Lingwei will not be able to rest in peace.”

“The Crown Princess has always added fuel to the fire...” Sheng Chumu saw Chujun’s serious expression. “Okay, I will discuss it with Brother-in-law.”

After Sheng Chumu left, Sheng Chujun entertained himself as he drank and ate. He was done eating and reached for his pouch to settle the bill.

“Eh? Where is Lingwei’s hairpin?” He lowered his head to look at the small pouch he attached to belt. “I might have left it in the Eastern Palace. I have to get it back.”

Sun Lingshu walked towards Fu Shui’s residence. She did not bring Shuangxi with her.

Shuangxi has been looking at her strangely these past two days and she had suddenly asked about the bag of arsenic. She had to avoid her question and said that she had passed it to Fu Shui to throw outside the palace. However, she wanted to tell Fu Shui about it first in case Shuangxi asked him about it. As to how she was going to bring it up to Fu Shui, she had yet to think about it.

As she was hesitating, she realised that she had walked into a dead end. She realised that she had been distracted and wanted to head back. However, she heard someone talking. She silently took a few steps closer and saw that one of the people was Fu Shui. The other was an unfamiliar internal attendant.

Fu Shui spoke, "Go back and tell Chief Yu that the Eastern Palace will make a move tomorrow. The world is finally going to undergo a huge change."

As Sun Lingshu heard this, she paled in fright. In the entire palace, there was only one chief with the surname Yu. Concubine Yan's attendant, Yu He. There could only be one explanation for Fu Shui to alert Yu He of such a big secret at this time.

Sun Lingshu was extremely shocked and her legs seemed to turn to steel. It was when Fu Shui saw her that she finally woke up from her trance. She was flustered as she ran back to her residence.

However, Fu Shui ran after her. Sun Lingshu turned around sharply. She glared at him. "Get out! If not, I am going to shout!"

Fu Shui was calm. "Crown Princess, what are you doing?"

"You heartless trash. The Crown Prince and I have treated you so well but you colluded with Concubine Yan!" Sun Lingshu did not understand why he was not afraid.

"Crown Princess, you have misunderstood. My interaction with Concubine Yan's people is not to betray the Crown Prince. Contrary to that, I am actually helping the Crown Prince." After staying in the Eastern palace for so long, he knew that this woman's heart was weak and she was not clever.

As expected, Sun Lingshu's anger turned to confusion. "Helping the Crown Prince?"

"Tomorrow, we will be able to get rid of Prince Han. The next one we have to deal with is Concubine Yan and Prince Zhou. Don't you think we should place some informants by their side?" Fu Shui laughed, "That person is Chief Yu."

Sun Lingshu did not believe him. "Yu He has served Concubine Yan for so many years and is Concubine Yan's most trusted servant. How could he betray Concubine Yan and side with the Crown Prince?"

"Everyone has ambitions. As long as you can satisfy his ambition, he will be able to do the thing that satisfies you. Sheng Chujun is a perfect example. Even brothers can turn to become enemies, much less a master and a servant." Fu Shui smiled once more.

Although Sun Lingshu was not smart, she was not stupid. "You men are always full of schemes. No matter what, I have to tell the Crown Prince."

Fu Shui was stern. "No, you will ruin my plan."

"I am the Crown Princess and I will be loyal only to the Crown Prince." *From the past till now, she only had one goal. That was to walk with the Crown Prince all the way.*

"Fine, if you want to tell the Crown Prince about this, then should we also tell him how you personally poisoned your own sister?"

Sun Lingshu froze as she turned around sharply. "Don't accuse me!"

Fu Shui made the final decision. "When you poisoned the jujube cakes, I was standing right outside the window."

In the silence, a pearl rolled out from beneath the cupboard, a shadow was trembling.

Fu Shui's gaze was penetrating. "Come out!"

Shuangxi stood up from behind the cupboard. She was carrying a jewellery box in her hands with a fearful expression on her face.

Ohhhhh snapppppppp. I'll do a mass release later on tonight so you guys don't have to be in suspense every few hours.

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Sheng Chujun got his hairpin back and was rushing through the garden. He had to quickly get out of here. All of a sudden, someone dashed out from the narrow path beside him and they almost collided.

He held the person's shoulders and could not help but be surprised. "Shuangxi?"

As soon as Shuangxi saw him, she immediately grabbed onto his wrist. "Sheng Chujun, Hurry! Hurry and go to the Sun Residence. Tell Master and Madam that the Crown Princess was the one that set the poison!"

Sheng Chujun was in disbelief. "Repeat what you just said!"

Shuangxi shouted, "It is true! I heard it personally! The Crown Princess was the one that poisoned the cakes with arsenic and framed Consort Han..."

Imperial Guards appeared, chasing after her aggressively.

Shuangxi hid behind Sheng Chujun in fright. "Save me...I know that that Crown Princess poisoned her own sister. She will kill me to silence me..."

"Bastard!" Sun Lingshu appeared from behind the guards. "You dare

to steal my things and still accuse me. How dare you say such malicious things to frame your owner!”

Two imperial guards surrounded them from behind Sheng Chujun. Shuangxi was not prepared and was dragged away by them.

“I am not lying! Everything that I said is real! Believe me, I am telling the truth!” Shuangxi continued to struggle and shout. However, she had no power to resist.

Sheng Chujun did not move. He only looked at Sun Lingshu expressionlessly. *So the Crown Princess was the true murderer of Lingwei and his elder sister, and he had just spoken up for her in front of his elder brother! He could not believe it but everything now made sense.*

Sun Lingshu tried to cover it up. “Shuangxi has been serving me for so many years, yet I have failed to see her true nature. I could have forgiven her even if she stole or lied. But in order to make excuses for herself, she actually dares to slander me and say that I killed Lingwei. I will not tolerate this. Sheng Chujun, you won’t believe the nonsense Shuangxi said right?”

Sheng Chujun fell silent for a long while. Just when Sun Lingshu was about to lose patience, he spoke, “If I pretend to believe you, things may still be repairable. But I don’t want to pretend and I am not willing to. I don’t care if I can walk out of the Eastern Palace alive today. Because the murderer of my lover is finally standing in front of me. If you want me to pretend to hear nothing and turn and leave, I can’t do it! I just want to ask a question that I have asked myself every single day since Lingwei died. Why? Lingwei is so innocent and pure. She would never hurt anyone, why did you kill her?”

“Okay, since you don’t want to pretend, I don’t have to pretend in front of you either.” Sun Lingshu chuckled bitterly, “Everything was because of you. You said that she is someone that would never hurt others but you are wrong. Ever since the days she liked you, she hurt me. She betrayed me. She could have fallen for anybody but why does it have to be you? Why must it be Consort Han’s younger brother?”

Sun Lingshu slowly got agitated. “She clearly knew that I was

fighting with Consort Han and Consort Han has been humiliating me. Why did she want to treat the sister that has doted on her like this? How could she be so heartless?"

Sheng Chujun stared at her. "Lingwei always said that you were a good sister. She had no idea that you had already turned into an evil witch and would do anything to achieve your goals. And what grudge do you have against my sister that you have to punish her with death?" He lowered his eyes and drew his sword. "However, it is alright. After you die, you can suffer in purgatory."

Sun Lingshu's eyes trembled slightly. "They wronged me first..."

All of a sudden, an arrow was shot into Sheng Chujun's chest.

Holding a bow in his hands, Fu Shui stood atop a man made mountain. He coldly ordered. "Sheng Chujun is trying to kill the Crown Princess, kill him!"

Imperial guards immediately surrounded Sheng Chujun and attacked him mercilessly. The heavily injured Sheng Chujun let out a long hiss and swiped viciously, making the guards retreat temporarily. He then stuck the sword into the ground and with his very last breath, he flung his hand out. The purple sparrow hairpin flew past Sun Lingshu's face.

Sun Lingshu let out a startled cry as she held her face and panicked. "What are you all doing? Hurry and kill him! Kill him now!"

At that very moment, Sheng Chujun's head drooped down. He was still standing but was no longer breathing.

Sun Lingshu glared at Sheng Chujun's body and hugged herself. "Perhaps what he said was true. If he was willing to pretend to believe me, tonight would have ended differently. Why was he so stupid? Why would he risk death just to accuse me?"

"Because he loved too strongly." Fu Shui picked up the purple sparrow hairpin and handed it over to Sun Lingshu. "Because he hated too strongly."

Sun Lingshu took the hairpin. "Loved too strongly? Hated too

strongly?”

“Once a person loves or hates too much, they will turn into someone crazy and have no regard for any consequences.” Fu Shui informed the guards to get rid of Sheng Chujun’s body.

“Wait.” Sun Lingshu walked up to the body. She trembled as she placed the hairpin in Sheng Chujun’s hands. “I don’t regret killing you but I still want to thank you. Thank you for not disappointing Lingwei.”

Out of nowhere, the faint sound of a flute being played filled the air, mourning for the loss of a young life.

Fu Rou looked at Prince Zhou who was playing the flute.

She did not want to come but the sounds from the flute were so miserable that it did not feel human. She thought of Tutor Qian and the sorrowful way he sang back then. In the end, he was gone. Now, she could no longer ignore this pipe sound and had to come over and take a look. It would be for the best if she was overthinking this. However, if he had something on his mind, perhaps she could help him resolve it and prevent misfortune from happening. Time will never stop moving and cannot be turned back. Life was precious.

Prince Zhou seemed to notice her as he lifted his eyes to look at her. He continued to finish playing the song.

“Which palace rule did I break such that Court Lady Fu is alerted?”
He was going to remember which one and break it a lot more in the future.

“Your Highness...” Fu Rou thought about it. “...has disrupted people’s dreams.”

Prince Zhou laughed at himself. “I must definitely be punished for this offense.”

“I am joking.” Fu Rou, however, spoke seriously, “The tune that you just played seemed to hide intense misery. Your Highness must be

feeling unsettled.”

“Court Lady Fu, you are also concerned about me?” *Does this mean that he still had hope?*

Fu Rou did not reply but instead asked, “What happened?”

“Nothing happened. I just recalled stuff that happened in the past.”

He recalled the time when Fu Rou had just entered the palace and embroidered the harmonious lotus for his mother. He recalled the peaceful days when Tutor Qian was by his side, when Sheng Chumu was rumoured to have died in battle and how she begged him to bring her out of the palace with tears in her eyes. He remembered staring at her from afar as she broke down in front of Sheng Chumu’s cenotaph.

“Fu Rou, answer one question of mine.”

“Please ask your question, Your Highness.”

“Sheng Chumu’s feelings have changed and he no longer loves you. If he dies one day, will you still be as heartbroken as you were in the past?”

“Don’t say anymore.” Ultimately, she was not willing for others to talk about things that hurt her.

“Court Lady Fu, you are extremely bold, you actually dare to ask a prince to stop talking. But do you think that you and Sheng Chumu can return to how you were in the past if I keep quiet? You know that you have been hurt, why can’t you forget it? Why can’t you let your wound heal? I really don’t understand a stubborn woman like you. Do you know how I feel when I see you so persistent in carrying out your stubborn ways?”

“I am a persistent person and you already knew it.” *Then why did he have to keep trying and make it impossible for them to be friends?* “There is no reason for liking a person. Even if Sheng Chumu is a wound in my heart, it is a wound that belongs to me. I don’t want it to heal and I don’t want others to touch it.”

“If your wound does not heal, it will only hurt more with time.”

“I am willing to let it hurt. The more it hurts, the more I can ingrain him in my bones.”

Prince Zhou fell silent as his gaze grew more and more intense. Fu Rou was extremely uncomfortable. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

He was determined. “I want to look at you properly so as to ingrain you in my bones.”

Fu Rou turned and left.

When Prince Zhou returned to his study room, his mother was there. His mother always appeared in Lingxiao Palace at unusual times.

“It has been long since I heard you play the flute.” Concubine Yan smiled before turning serious. “There is news from the Eastern Palace. Do you know about it?”

Prince Zhou nodded.

“As soon as the Crown Prince kills Prince Han, the Emperor will abdicate the Crown Prince. Both the Crown Prince and Prince Han will be taken down and no one will be able to stop you from being the ruler of Great Tang.” All her patience and concessions over the years were finally becoming worth it.

“All credit goes to you for being able to reach the stage it is at today.” He did not know everything right from the beginning. However, Hong Yide’s death made him suspicious.

As an outsider, he could tell that there was someone sabotaging the relationship between the Crown Prince and Prince Han, causing it to deteriorate. Everything then fell into place. Wouldn't he be the person that benefited most from this? However, since he was not the one that set this up. There could only be one person; his mother!

Concubine Yan spoke warmly, “I know that you feel as if you have been pushed to a place where you cannot choose. However, son, this is reality. Everyone's the same. If you are not at the highest position,

you will be controlled by others and can only feel suppressed. Don't worry, after you become the Crown Prince, you will become the Emperor. You can then rest assured and don't have to feel that way anymore."

Who asked the Empress to be so overbearing and try to stifle her all the time? The Emperor was the same, if he were any further ahead, how would she and her son live? In addition, just a slight instigation could make the Crown Prince try to get rid of his own biological brother. He would not even have a hint of brotherly relationship with her Ge'er!

Prince Zhou replied blandly, "It is late. Mother, you should head back to rest."

"Okay, I will go back. You should rest early too." As Concubine Yan was leaving, she recalled a matter. "Sheng Chumu is like Prince Han's arm. They always enter and leave court together. Will the assassins be targetting him too?"

"Yes." With this answer, he fell deep into the mud.

He knew his mother did this for his sake and also understood that his current position was difficult and will be even more difficult in the future. Hence, when his mother told him about this chessboard, he did not have huge objections. He smoothly agreed to becoming a chess piece.

"Sigh, poor Court Lady Fu is going to be depressed again. But a short pain is better than a long pain right?" Concubine Yan looked at her son.

Prince Zhou lowered his eyes, remaining expressionless. He spoke politely, "Have a good night, Mother."

He understood his mother's efforts. However, there was also a limit to how much he could tolerate. Ultimately, he still hesitated when it came to these evil plots and the innocent lives that were implicated.

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The Crown Prince and Fu Shui were playing chess.

The Crown Prince already knew what happened with Shuangxi and Sheng Chujun. He did not blame Sun Lingshu at all. He simply wrote it as Sheng Chujun believing a despicable servant's words and choosing to assassinate the Crown Princess. His death was deserving.

"Did the Crown Princess poison Sun Lingwei?" The Crown Prince only asked this now.

Fu Shui was about to set down a chess piece when his actions halted. "Since when did you suspect it, Your Highness?"

The Crown Prince's eyes dimmed. "After Sun Lingwei passed away, the Crown Princess asked me a weird question. She asked me if Sun Lingwei's death was worth it. I started to suspect it from that moment."

Actually, it was not hard to guess. If the Han couple were to actually poison the jujube cakes, it would be like confessing without duress. At that time, he had been furious and did not think much of it. However, as time passed, he felt like something was wrong. Now, the bow had been pulled and he had no choice but to release it.

Fu Shui asked, "Since you were suspicious, why didn't you ask the Crown Princess?"

“She is my wife and the mother of my child.” Sun Lingshu had changed. She became cruel and vicious all because of him.

He still remembered that petal rain. She was like a fairy descending on earth. If not for the precarious state that he was in, there would be no need for her to resort to such unscrupulous deeds in order to help him. Therefore, he could not abandon her.

Fu Shui suddenly said, “The Crown Princess could kill her own sister for you. Your love moves me. If one day, Your Highness needs me to die...”

The Crown Prince looked up abruptly and stared straight at Fu Shui. He cut him off, “That will never happen! I told you that we have to be close friends for life. It doesn’t matter if I am the Crown Prince or the Emperor, no matter how my status changes, you will be you and I will be me. We will play chess together and talk about our troubles. From the day when you appeared in front of me, I was grateful. Grateful that heaven returned my best friend to me. I said that I would protect you and will not let the same thing that happened to Chen Ji happen to you. I will do it and I will not change.”

Fu Shui was slightly moved. “What if you don’t change but I do?”

“If you do change one day, then hide it from me, don’t let me find out. Let me only remember our friendship.” He did not have any more wishes in this life.

Fu Shui was in a daze for a while before he laughed. “Your Highness, can you not give such a serious expression? You are scaring me.”

The Crown Prince smiled as well. “I have so many troubles and can only joke around to make myself feel more comfortable.” His sleeve accidentally knocked off a chess piece. He bent over to pick it up.

As Fu Shui looked at the Crown Prince, something shifted in his heart and he muttered, “Maybe you should consider shifting back tomorrow’s plan. One mistake and the entire game will be lost.”

As the Crown Prince straightened his back, his face was full of questions. “What did you say? Entire game will be lost?”

Fu Shui controlled his expression as he laughed to cover it. "I said that you have lost this game."

"You are the one that lost." The Crown Prince confidently placed one chess piece on the board. "Look, your huge dragon is gone."

Fu Shui replied, "Mhmm, gone."

It turns out the feeling of sorrow is like the warm fire being put out in winter. The fire has been extinguished and the heart has turned cold.

Fu Rou was in the main hall of the Eastern Palace. Yesterday, the Six Offices received the report that the Crown Princess' servant, Shuangxi, was careless and fell into a well. She had drowned.

If it were other people, Fu Rou would not have suspected anything. However, this was someone she had crossed paths with before. In the beginning, when the Crown Princess had been targetting her, Shuangxi was her attentive helper and was extremely loyal to the Crown Princess. Moreover, Shuangxi accompanied the Crown Princess when she married into the palace. How could she die in such a strange manner?

Sun Lingshu walked out from the inner hall and sat down. She adopted an arrogant posture. "She was just a palace maid yet you came all the way here for her. There are so many things to do in the Six Offices, will you be able to handle everything if you attend to everything personally?"

Fu Rou could sense that she was not welcomed. However, she remained calm. "Shuangxi is different from regular palace maids. She entered the palace along with Your Highness. I should come over. Please do not be too sad, Your Highness."

Hearing Fu Rou try to console her, Sun Lingshu recalled that she should be feeling upset and she frowned. "It is hard not to be upset. After all, she has served me for so many years."

Fu Rou stared intensely at her. Sun Lingshu felt guilty. "Court Lady Fu, what are you looking at?"

Fu Rou pointed to her own face. "Here. How did Your Highness' face get injured?"

Sun Lingshu touched her own face, it was the scar from the hairpin. She did not expect Fu Rou to notice even after she had powdered her face. She could only come up with an excuse. "Xiang'er accidentally scratched me yesterday. It is no big deal."

"Didn't the Imperial Grandson enter the palace yesterday?" As she was managing the Six Offices, Fu Rou was very alert. "Imperial Concubine Wang loves young children and requested for him to stay the night. Shouldn't he still be at Fu An Palace now?"

"Yesterday, when I was carrying him to Fu An Palace, he was playing around and scratched me." *One lie could only be covered with another lie.*

Fu Rou nodded. "You should not put face powder on your wound. Although it can cover it slightly, it is not good for the wound."

Sun Lingshu was courteous. "Thank you for your reminder, Court Lady Fu."

Fu Rou pretended not to be paying attention. "So how did Shuangxi die?"

Sun Lingshu was extremely alarmed. "Didn't they report it? The internal attendants were collecting water when they found her body in the well. Perhaps she could not see the well properly and had fallen in last night."

"That does not make sense. It is not like Shuangxi had just entered Eastern Palace. She is already very familiar with this place. She should know very well that there is a well there."

Sun Lingshu was unhappy. "Are you here to console me or interrogate me?"

Fu Rou remained calm. "I would not dare. I simply think that it is strange. The Six Offices manage various kinds of things. Anything that happens in the palace, regardless whether it is a small or large issue, will implicate the Six Offices. However, you are also right. The

Six Offices should not be investigating. If there are any doubts surrounding a palace maid's death, the scroll should be handed over to Chief Cao from the Internal Attendant Department and they should be the one in charge of investigating things. The Six Offices will cooperate with them. Oh right, Prince Han is also the official in charge of Internal Affairs, a copy should be handed over to him as well."

Sun Lingshu pretended to be composed as she took a sip of tea. She accidentally scalded her tongue and hissed in pain, throwing the cup down.

"Ah, my clothes are wet. Let me go and change. Please wait a moment, Court Lady Fu." Sun Lingshu felt as if Fu Rou had noticed something amiss and wanted to look for Fu Shui to discuss with him.

Fu Rou looked coldly at Sun Lingshu as she left the hall in a hurry. Fu Rou drank her tea as well.

Strange. The tea was warm. Moreover, the two cups were served one after the other. How could one be scalding hot while the other warm?

When she entered the Eastern Palace, she had noticed that something was not right. The place was heavily guarded and the number of guards had increased. She had barely sat and she already saw two patrolling groups go past. Everyone had swords on them as if they were ready to draw their swords at any time. In addition, the Crown Princess was hardly depressed but seemed more panicky. She had just asked a few questions and the Crown Princess was already startled. Shuangxi's death was extremely suspicious and the way the Eastern Palace was behaving made her feel as if something big was about to happen. She felt like she should not stay here any longer. However, at a time like this, the more anxious she seemed, the more suspicious she would appear. Hence, she drank her tea and sat calmly.

Sun Lingshu entered from the inner hall. This time, when facing Fu Rou, her expression was completely different. "I don't have many good people by my side. Shuangxi was someone I had taught for so many years, thinking that she could become my confidante and help me handle family matters. Who would have known that she would leave me like this. If things were to be blown up to the Internal

Attendants Department and they want to investigate, my reputation would be ruined.”

Fu Shui told her to watch Fu Rou’s expression carefully. If Fu Rou persists that Shuangxi’s death is suspicious or she beats around the bush, it would mean that Fu Rou knows something is up. If Fu Rou rushes to leave, it would also mean the same thing. This was the most critical period for the Eastern Palace and they could not let her go if that was the case. If not, there would be consequences.

Fu Rou replied, “Your Highness, you have misunderstood. I said that if a palace maid’s death is suspicious, we would have to hand the matter over to the chief of the Internal Attendants Department to investigate. However, Shuangxi fell into the well by accident. Although it is a pity, things are clear and there is no reason to hand the matter over to the Internal Attendants Department.”

Sun Lingshu silently breathed a sigh of relief. “You are right.”

From afar, there were guards passing by again. Fu Rou glanced out. Sun Lingshu immediately took note of her every move and tested, “Court Lady Fu, are you in a rush to get back?”

Fu Rou looked back at her and answered seriously, “I am in no rush. Today, I came mainly because there are things from the Six Offices that I need to report to Your Highness.”

As she spoke till here, she gestured for her accompanying palace maid to bring over a stack of books. She then talked endlessly to Sun Lingshu on the Eastern Palace’s expense, rules for selecting palace maids annually and practices regarding their stock of gold and silver etc.

Sun Lingshu usually only cared about the Crown Prince. Whatever Fu Rou was telling her was causing her to become confused. As she saw the sun start to set, she yawned.

Fu Rou asked, “Are you tired, Your Highness?”

“I am not tired but I already know everything that you said.” To outsiders, she was a valiant female master.

“That’s good.” Fu Rou looked at the sky. “Oh, look at me, once I start talking I cannot stop. It is already so late. I wonder if you have any other instructions for me, Your Highness?”

Sun Lingshu thought about how Fu Rou chattered on and on. She guessed that Fu Rou did not find anything strange and sent her off. She did not want to ruin the huge event that was going to happen today.

“I don’t have anything for you. Court Lady Fu, you have many things to do, I won’t keep you back any longer.” Sun Lingshu got up and personally sent Fu Rou off.

Fu Rou found it strange but did not say anything. She followed her to the front steps. “Your Highness, you don’t have to send me off. I will take my leave now.” Fu Rou walked down the steps and headed towards the Eastern Palace’s main gate. Her steps were unhurried.

Sun Lingshu looked at Fu Rou’s back view for a while. She could not see any indication of anything suspicious and turned to head back into the palace.

All of a sudden, a shriek pierced through the cold air.

Court Lady

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Sun Lingshu turned around abruptly. She saw that Fu Rou did not seem to be affected by the shriek as she left without turning back. Sun Lingshu thought it was slightly strange.

At this moment, a palace maid ran out from the side door. She stumbled and crawled up the stairs, shouting, "A dead person! Your Highness, there is a dead person!"

Sun Lingshu was startled. "What dead person? Don't talk nonsense." She glanced at Fu Rou's direction. At this distance and with the palace maid shouting, it was impossible for Fu Rou not to hear.

The palace maid shouted in fright, "It is true! In the box, it is Third Young Master Sheng...he...he's dead!"

Fu Rou halted but did not turn back. She then started walking again, increasing her pace slightly.

Sun Lingshu, who was watching Fu Rou, immediately stared sharply at her. She commanded loudly, "Court Lady Fu, please hold up!"

Fu Rou pretended not to hear. She was about to reach the main door. Sun Lingshu ordered, "Guards, hold her back!"

A group of guards dashed up and stood in front of Fu Rou and her accompanying palace maid. They pointed their swords at her.

Fu Rou finally turned and looked at Sun Lingshu from afar. Sun Lingshu walked over to her.

Sun Lingshu looked down at her from above, as if wanting to poison her. “Court Lady Fu, did something scare you? Why are you in such a rush that I can’t even call you to stay?”

Fu Rou did not reply and did not look at Sun Lingshu. As she lowered her head, she saw her palace maid, who was in a frightened state. “You said that Third Young Master Sheng is dead inside a box. Which Third Young Master Sheng?”

Study room in the Secretariat Department.

Grand Prince Liang entered, and was puzzled. “Why is there nothing going on at Prince Han’s side? Did he return to his mansion already?”

The Crown Prince sat by the window and gazed out into the garden. “Every day, at this time, he will return to his mansion to eat. It is a habit that he adopted after he got married. Now, although Consort Han is no longer around, old habits are hard to change.”

Grand Prince Liang smirked, “It serves him right for staying together with Consort Han.”

A breeze blew past a red plum flower tree. A flower dropped in front of the Crown Prince as he suddenly seemed to fall in a trance. “Consort Han did not poison the jujube cakes.”

Grand Prince Liang was startled. “What? Consort Han did not place the poison? She did not kill Sun Lingwei? Then Prince Han lost his consort for nothing and became enemies with the Eastern Palace? Crown Prince, we are at a critical juncture. What do you mean when you say something like this?”

The Crown Prince did not know how to reply.

Grand Prince Liang glared at him for a long while before waving his hands impatiently. “Forget it, forget it. Regardless of whether Consort Han placed the poison, she is already dead. Your relationship with

Prince Han is already ruined. Let's just do this! Once you shoot, you can't take back your arrow. Prince Han has to die today!"

"Once you shoot, you can't take back your arrow..." The Crown Prince muttered these words as he laughed bitterly, "It's too late to turn back."

At this moment, Prince Han and Sheng Chumu walked past the garden. The Crown Prince stood up and walked towards the window. He coincidentally exchanged glances with Prince Han.

Prince Han froze and hesitated for a while before nodding in acknowledgement. "Your Highness."

"Are you leaving?" The Crown Prince suddenly recalled the times when the two of them drank and hunted together. They would discuss ancient and modern analects. *How did the brother that he once felt completely comfortable with end up so estranged?*

Prince Han laughed foolishly, "Your Highness knows me. I don't like the food from the Imperial Kitchen and I cannot bear being hungry. It is already so late, I have to go back and eat."

The Crown Prince smiled as well. "You have always been this way since young. You don't care about anything other than food. I remember when you were about eight years old, you ate three roasted chickens in one sitting. You were so full you could not even sit and Imperial Mother was so anxious." *His Imperial Mother was no longer around.*

Prince Han scratched his head. "When I was young, I had a huge appetite. I can't do it anymore. Now, don't talk about three chickens, even two is too much. Sigh, if only people can remain at eight years old. How great would it be to be carefree without worries? I am starving and will not carry on talking. Your Highness, I will be leaving first." *His Imperial Mother was no longer around.*

Nobody could make them hold hands ever again...

The Crown Prince's eyes turned icy as he looked unreadable. "Go ahead, Fourth Brother."

Prince Han did not say more and left without hesitation. Only when he walked out of the palace gates and got onto the horse did he get distracted for a moment. Prince Han only refocused when Sheng Chumu called out, “Brother-in-law.”

“The Crown Prince called me Fourth Brother just now...” He laughed bitterly. “It has been long since he called me that.”

Sheng Chumu’s expression did not change. “No matter how affectionately he calls you, he has still decided to murder you. The Crown Prince called you Fourth Brother to send you off. There is still one word after Fourth Brother -- go [1].” He heard it clearly, not missing out a single word. That includes the evil intentions he harboured. “The arrow has already been mounted, he will definitely shoot.”

Prince Han suppressed the pain he felt. “That’s right, he thought I would not have noticed. Go, go-” His tone turned icy as well. “It is time to take revenge for my wife, haiya!”

His fine horse ran on all fours. In front of them was the tiger’s den. How would you catch the tiger without entering the tiger’s den? Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

The guards dragged Fu Rou into a side room and pushed her in roughly.

Sun Lingshu stood outside the door, her eyes were icy. “Didn’t you want to know which Third Young Master Sheng died? I will be kind and let you see.”

Fu Rou’s eyes were already fixed on the box by the corner.

Sun Lingshu mocked, “Why? Are you scared? I never thought that there would be times when Court Lady Fu is afraid.”

Fu Rou crawled up from the ground and slowly walked to the front of the box. As soon as she saw the corpse, she closed her eyes in pain. She recalled the first time they met and how this young man had called her “Sister-in-law”. Although he had a glib tongue, his eyes

were always clear. Now, those eyes had lost their light.

She closed her eyes for this and turned to the woman standing by the door. Her voice was filled with sorrow and anger. "Did you kill him?"

Sun Lingshu's mouth pulled up at one side. "Yes."

Fu Rou asked, "Why?"

Sun Lingshu snorted, "Why again? Before Sheng Chujun passed away, he was like you, he kept asking why." Her gaze suddenly became dark. "Maybe everyone in the mortal world struggles to reach the end just to ask why."

Fu Rou blurted, "Why did you kill him?"

Sun Lingshu was so calm it was frightening. "Because he seduced Lingwei and bewitched her wisdom. He made the sister I trusted most in this world, betray me. I had no choice but to clear up my own family. My sister is dead, how can he live freely in this world?"

Fu Rou was shocked. "Clear up your own family? Were you the one that poisoned Sun Lingwei's jujube cakes?"

"Yes." There was nothing Sun Lingshu could not admit to. *The Eastern Palace was about to rule the world, she would be the mother of this country.*

"Then...then Consort Han...you clearly did it yet you framed Consort Han in front of the late Empress and made the Empress kill her wrongly!" *This was too frightening! She knew that Consort Han had been framed but she never thought that Sun Lingwei would have been murdered by her own sister!*

"Wrongly? She deserved it!" There was no change in Sun Lingshu's eyes. "Ever since I entered the Eastern Palace, she always went against me. She kept on humiliating me. If she did not go so far, this wouldn't have happened. I paid with my sister's life to make Imperial Mother grant her poisoned wine. A life for a life, she is not wronged at all."

"You are crazy." Fu Rou shivered even though she was not cold.

“It is okay if I am crazy, as long as I win in the end. I will get back whatever I lost. No matter how difficult it is, I will be the last one laughing. Consort Han was extremely arrogant in the past but isn’t she dead now? Not only does she have to die, the people around her have to die as well. Sheng Chujun is dead. Soon it will be Prince Han and Sheng Chumu.”

“No! I will not let you hurt Sheng Chumu!” Fu Rou lost control and shouted.

“Court Lady Fu, it is too late. It seems like you can’t even save yourself now.” Sun Lingshu smiled as she walked out. She coldly ordered. “Lock the door and guard her properly.”

Fu Rou sat down slowly. She looked through the windows into the sky. All of a sudden, she saw a light ray shoot up into the sky.

In the Secretariat Department, the Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang saw it too. Grand Prince Liang cried out in joy. “Success! Prince Han is dead! Your Highness, it is our turn now.”

The Crown Prince slammed the table and stood up with determined eyes. He shouted as he walked out of the study room. The guards that he had secretly placed in every corner came out and formed neat rows.

The Crown Prince spoke, “There are despicable people creating trouble in Chang’an. You all shall follow me and enter the palace to protect Great Tang’s Royal Family! After this is over, you will be rewarded for your efforts!”

This was not just a plan to get rid of Prince Han. How could his Imperial Father forgive him if he killed Prince Han? He was sick of always having to fear for his Crown Prince status. Any tiny mistake would get him wronged. His Imperial Mother was no longer around and his Imperial Father had always been strict. If he still doesn't take action, sooner or later, he would lose everything. He just needed to take the first step and obtain the throne. When that happens, who would be able to make him worry about how much he stands to gain and lose? He will no longer have to live everyday in fear.

Moreover, there was nothing he could not do. After all, his Imperial Father had done it first. Back then, his Imperial Father had gotten rid of his own two older brothers and forced the Grand Emperor to give up the throne. That was how his Imperial Father had gotten the world. Besides, he was the Crown Prince and the world should belong to him anyway. He had more right than his Imperial Father back then.

From today onwards, he, Li Chengqian, would be the ruler!

1. go implies to leave/die, depending on context

Poor Chujun. T_T

It's not over until it's over. Remember that, readers!

We still have a lot more drama coming up, and A LOT more twists.

Court Lady

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By the lake on the outskirts of the city, Prince Zhou was lying on a huge rock and sunbathing, with his hands tucked behind his head. Unlike the brutal and bleak winter in Chang'an, the weather was good here. The yellow grass was slowly turning green again, spring was about to come.

Someone came to the huge rock and smiled. "Blood is flowing in the city but you are enjoying the peacefulness here."

Prince Zhou glanced to the side, it was Fu Shui.

"Didn't you run pretty quickly too? On such an important day, you should be staying by the Crown Prince side and watching the show unfold. If you think you can gain anything from me, I am afraid I am going to let you down. You should look for my mother."

He was just a chess piece. He was not even as important as Fu Shui. Fu Shui was the chess player.

"Can't I be like you and occasionally find a peaceful place to enjoy the scenery?" Fu Shui did not mind the snide in Prince Zhou's tone. "Yan Zifang's secret message is about to arrive."

Prince Zhou smiled. "The Crown Prince thinks victory is in his hands. He would never expect that the person he trusted most to betray him right from the beginning. From the start, he was bound to fail."

Yan Zifang had sent Ma Haihu to send a message to the Emperor in the Hot Spring Palace. In the letter, it was written that the Crown Prince had been bewitched by Grand Prince Liang and was going to kill Prince Han and take over the palace.

Prince Zhou continued, “You really choose the best time to get Yan Zifang to send the letter to the Hot Spring Palace. If you sent it any earlier, Imperial Father would rush back in time to save Prince Han and Prince Han would not die. Any later, the Crown Prince would gain control after killing Prince Han and take over the throne, causing Imperial Father, who is outside of the capital, to lose everything. Then the entire world would belong to the Crown Prince. As long as the letter is not sent too early or too late, it will ensure that Prince Han will die and Imperial Father will rush back in time to gain control. The Crown Prince will not obtain victory. Fu Shui, you are really talented. Everything has been calculated by you.”

“Thank you for your praise.” Although Fu Shui could not hear any hint of genuine praise.

“However, you are also stupid.” Alas, Prince Zhou still had things to say. “There was once a person that was going to be the ruler of the world. He looked to you as a friend and trusted you. However, you conspired against him and betrayed him, causing him to lose everything. Have you ever thought that if Li Chengqian were to ascend the throne, he would bring you riches and power? He might even give you more than what my mother would give you?”

“I have always been planning hard for your future. Now as we are about to succeed, you are saying such words that sway one’s heart. The one that is stupid is not me, it is you.” Fu Shui did not understand Prince Zhou.

“If the Crown Prince is dead, will you be upset?”

“No.” Fu Shui’s expression did not change.

“You are an emotionless person.” Prince Zhou could not bring himself to admire this kind of person.

“I am someone that wants to achieve my own dreams. For this, I can

lie, hurt others and do anything. Of course I can be heartless and emotionless.” *Although the Crown Prince treated him well, it was a pity that he was the son of Li Shimin.*

Du He led an army to try and control the East City. Lu Qi was supposed to capture the city gates but was stopped by Yan Zifang.

“If I were you, I would not go to the city gates.”

Lu Qi was puzzled. “What did you say?”

Yan Zifang spoke the truth. “The Crown Prince is bound to fail. We have no need to perish with him.”

Lu Qi suddenly drew out his sword and pointed it at Yan Zifang. “I knew you were up to no good!”

Yan Zifang’s expression did not change. “You can kill me but you won’t be able to save the Crown Prince from failure. The Emperor has already received the letter exposing the Crown Prince’s plot. The main army is most likely in the midst of returning to the capital. The Crown Prince’s new chair has not even been warmed and he is about to receive the fury of the Emperor’s main army. He has no chance of winning. All the Crown Prince’s henchmen will be wiped out.”

“Only we know about the Crown Prince’s plan, who would send a secret letter to the Emperor?” Lu Qi suddenly looked fiercely at Yan Zifang. “You...”

Yan Zifang openly admitted, “Of course it was me.”

“You traitor!” Lu Qi swung out at Yan Zifang.

Yan Zifang blocked his sword with a single move. “I have never truly sided with the Eastern Palace. However, as your saviour, I would warn you one last time. The Eastern Palace is about to go down. Your only way is to leave Chang’an.”

Lu Qi bellowed, “Why should I believe you?”

"You can choose not to trust me. However, I have already given up claiming my contributions to the Crown Prince and admitted to you that I was the one that wrote to the Emperor. Do you think I would lie to you? Let me tell you. I am actually with Prince Zhou." Yan Zifang took out a badge.

Lu Qi was shocked. "This is Concubine Yan's trusted item! You..."

Yan Zifang replied, "Right from the beginning, Eastern Palace was being played and controlled by Concubine Yan. Concubine Yan knows all about the Crown Prince's plan."

Lu Qi was still suspicious. "My father and you are enemies. Why would you save me?"

Yan Zifang fell silent for a moment. "I want Lu Yingying."

Lu Qi misunderstood and thought he was a pervert. Lu Qi grew furious. "You want to humiliate my sister to get your revenge. I will kill you!"

Yan Zifang blocked his move and did not do more. It was obvious that Yan Zifang was holding back. "With the Eastern Palace's failure, your father and you have pledged loyalty to the Eastern Palace. Grand Prince Liang is also doomed. Other than me, who reported to the Emperor, who else can protect your sister? If Yingying does not follow me, she would truly be humiliated! Now, you have two choices. You could follow the Crown Prince and get destroyed by the Emperor's army; with you and your father branded as traitors, Yingying will be banished as a slave. Or you can protect your own lives and hand your sister to someone that truly loves and can protect her. Choose!"

Truly loves Yingying? Lu Qi was slightly confused. However, as he saw Yan Zifang's determined gaze, he unknowingly believed him slightly. As he thought till here, he shouted out loud. He knocked Yan Zifang's sword away before turning to leave.

Yan Zifang knew that he was heading in the direction of Duke Chen Residence.

As soon as Lu Qi returned to the residence, he instructed Housekeeper Wu to pack their luggage. He returned to his own study to burn some documents. As he was burning them, he thought of Fu Yin. He then threw down the things in his hands and walked out. Unexpectedly, he knocked into Fu Tao.

Fu Tao was startled. Sheng Chumu had informed him and he knew things would get chaotic today. He intentionally avoided Lu Yunji and Lu Qi. He was here to take Fu Yin away.

Lu Qi was confused and did not think too much about Fu Tao's appearance. He even thought that Fu Tao would be a good assistant.

As the two of them walked into Fu Yin's garden, Fu Tao saw that the windows were hammered shut with nails and wooden planks. There was even a chain as thick as a wrist around the door. He could not help but become furious. However, when he saw Lu Qi smash down the door, he was slightly confused.

Fu Yin was calm as she saw Lu Qi walk in. "You are finally here."

A glimmer of hope flashed in Lu Qi's eyes. "Were you waiting for me?"

"That's right. I was waiting for you to end all of this. End my pain as well as yours. Ever since I have decided to follow you, I have been living in pain everyday. I had countless nightmares and have always been awoken by them. Now, what I really want is to end everything." Fu Yin had thought things through. *Only death could free her.*

"Okay, I will give you what you want." Lu Qi suddenly drew his sword. As soon as Fu Tao saw this, his expression hardened and he silently took out his dagger. He approached Lu Qi quietly.

Fu Yin noticed and her breathing quickened. As Fu Tao raised the dagger, she could no longer continue sitting and pretending. She ran over and hugged Lu Qi, turning her own back to Fu Tao.

Fu Tao was shocked but seemed to realise something and quickly put away his dagger.

Lu Qi did not see anything. Fu Yin's hug made him feel that warmth

had seeped into his bones. However, in the next moment, his eyes turned icy.

“How many more times are you going to do this? Are you going to play with my feelings over and over again? Don’t you hate me? Don’t you want to kill me? Wasn’t Du Ning the guy you love most? Who do you think I am? In order to survive, you are now willing to hug me?” He suddenly pushed Fu Yin away and shouted out loud. He lifted his sword and swung it down.

The wooden table in front of Fu Yin split into half. Lu Qi shouted, “Xi Tao! Take this woman away from Chang’an!”

Fu Tao thought that things were going his way and went to help Fu Yin. Fu Yin suddenly thought of their child. “No, I don’t want to go. What about my child? I want to see my child!”

Lu Qi’s voice lowered, “You never wanted to give birth to him. What right do you have to see him? Xi Tao, take her away!”

“Yes.” Fu Tao forcefully dragged Fu Yin away. Once they got out, he lowered his voice to explain. “The Crown Prince wants to kill Prince Han and take over the throne. My teacher is already prepared. Lu Yunji and Lu Qi had pledged themselves to the Crown Prince a long time ago and they are about to be in trouble.”

“What?” Fu Yin wanted to get rid of Fu Tao’s hand. “I want to take my child together!”

Fu Tao did not let go. “I heard Lu Qi instruct the housekeeper to send the child out of the city. Let’s leave first, we can’t stay here any longer.”

“Lu Qi...” Fu Yin was worried.

“I am afraid that he will be running away faster than you and me. He has already instructed the stables to prepare the fastest horse.” Fu Tao made up lies. *At this time, bad people will bring about their own self-destruction. As for good people like them, they had to let heaven lead the way.*

End of mass release. But don't worry, there will still be chapters daily

until we get to the end! We'll have everything finished by May 31st!

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Swords and shields clash, creating a cacophony of metal hitting sounds from all around the palace. As soon as anyone saw the Crown Prince's guards, they politely gave way. It made the Crown Prince feel as if he owned the world and made him believe in this plan more.

However, when he and Grand Prince Liang barged into Xinnan's palace, wanting to retrieve his son, he saw Xinnan sitting calmly outside the palace. All her palace maids were lined up neatly. They did not seem at all flustered, making him feel out of place.

"Xinnan, hand over my son." Xiang'er had been with Imperial Concubine Wang, but Grand Prince Liang had returned empty handed and said that Xinnan had taken away his child.

"Xiang'er is still young. Elder Brother, are you going to bring him down this path of no return?" Xinnan looked at the dense mass of cold metal rays opposite her and could not help but sigh. *When did the elder brother that doted on her lose the fondness in his eyes?*

"Bunch of nonsense. As Great Tang's heir, I have received Heaven's mandate to become the emperor. I will uphold righteousness and get rid of unlawful people. I am walking the right path. How can this be the path of no return?" *Ever since he became the Crown Prince, he had been walking on the edge of the cliff. His life had always been in danger.*

Who cared about him?

“There is no need to talk with her any longer!” Grand Prince Liang instructed the guards, “Capture the Princess and grill her for the Imperial Grandson’s whereabouts!”

However, as soon as their guards made a move, Sheng Chuling appeared with a group of Secret Guards. They drew out their swords in confrontation.

“Sheng Chuling, how dare you draw your sword?” The Crown Prince spoke icily.

“I am part of Great Tang’s Secret Army. We are in charge of protecting Great Tang’s Royal Palace. My sword will point at whoever dares to barge into the Royal Palace.” *Especially against those that think of rebelling.*

“Impudent! Who dares to activate the army within the Royal Palace?” Linghu Deguan entered and saw both sides in position. He did not hold back and waved his arms. A huge mass of the Secret Army surrounded both sides. “What is going on?”

Sheng Chuling replied loudly, “General Linghu, the Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang brought guards and barged into Princess Xinnan’s palace. I am doing my duty and protecting Her Highness.”

Grand Prince Liang twisted the truth. “Linghu Deguan, Secret Guard Sheng Chuling drew his sword at the Crown Prince. He is conspiring. Hurry and capture Sheng Chuling for the Crown Prince to deal with him!”

“Under His Majesty’s grace, I am in control of the Secret Guards to protect the Royal Palace. I have to ask Your Highness what are you planning to do by bringing guards and barging into the palace?” Linghu Deguan was not blind.

“The Crown Prince is Great Tang’s heir, the Royal Palace is his home. He can enter whenever he wants. What do you mean barging? Moreover, the Emperor has allowed the Crown Prince to manage the country. Now, whatever the Crown Prince says goes.” Grand Prince

Liang stood very straight.

Linghu Deguan narrowed his eyes. "Just because he is in charge of the country, he can do whatever he wants?"

The Crown Prince spoke in an amicable manner to Linghu Deguan. "General Linghu, there is a reason for this. Prince Han is creating trouble and conspired to activate an army in Chang'an. I have sent men to kill him. Sheng Chuling is a henchman that Prince Han inserted in the palace. He colluded with a few guards to threaten me with Princess Xinnan and the Imperial Grandson. I chased after him in order to stop him from hurting anyone in the palace. In my hurry, I did not have time to notify you."

Linghu Deguan did not want to offend either side and hesitated.

Grand Prince Liang was impatient. "General Linghu, at this critical juncture, we cannot hesitate and make a huge mistake. Prince Han is creating trouble and will be killed. Do you want to die along with Prince Han?"

"Uncle, my head and body are still joined together, there is no need to accompany me to die."

The Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang turned back in shock, only to see Prince Han walk in confidently.

Xinnan was delighted. "Fourth Brother!"

"Prince Han, why are you..." The Crown Prince never would have imagined his plan to fail.

Prince Han helped him to finish his sentence. "Why am I still alive? Because I am lucky and managed to escape. Not only did you send people to kill me, you even barged into the Royal Palace and threatened the Royal Family. Imperial Father is still around, yet you are thinking of usurping the throne. How ambitious of you!"

Although the Crown Prince was flustered, he was obstinate. "Don't accuse me! You were the one that was unhappy with me and secretly plotted to rebel when Imperial Father is not in the capital. How dare you enter the palace and talk nonsense in front of me?"

Prince Han chuckled coldly, “If I did not enter then should I be going to Hot Spring Palace to complain to Imperial Father?”

The Crown Prince looked sluggish. Grand Prince Liang was unreasonable. “Linghu Deguan, you are seeing for yourself how Prince Han is disrespectful to the Crown Prince. Hurry and take Prince Han down. Oh right, take Sheng Chuling down as well.”

Princess Xinnan learned how to talk like Grand Prince Liang. “Linghu Deguan, this is a critical moment. One mistake and you will regret for life. Imperial Father trusts you and entrusted the duty of protecting the Royal Palace to you. You have to distinguish between what is right and wrong. You can’t be bewitched by people with ulterior motives.”

Linghu Deguan summoned his courage. “Both Your Highnesses claim that the other is conspiring. May I know if you have evidence?”

The Crown Prince replied, “I am the witness.”

Grand Prince Liang added, “I am the witness as well.”

Prince Han snorted, “What kind of witnesses are you? Come, bring my witness!”

Prince Han’s guards pushed a man to the front. They pulled his hair to make him look up. It was Jisun Chenxin!

The Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang’s expression changed completely.

Jisun Chenxin looked like he was in pain. “The Crown Prince was afraid that Prince Han was gaining the Emperor’s trust and ordered me to assassinate Prince Han.” *However, he never thought that Prince Han was already prepared and he had killed a stand in. He thought that he had killed the right person and sent the signal. Now, everything was too late.*

The Crown Prince panicked. “What did you gain from Prince Han for you to dare to tell such lies?”

“The punishment for framing the heir is death!” Grand Prince Liang

drew out his sword and attacked Jisun Chenxin. It was obvious that he wanted to silence him.

Linghu Deguan blocked Grand Prince Liang. “Even if Jisun Chenxin has committed a crime, he is not for Your Highness to deal with...”

Jisun Chenxin was actually feeling slightly guilty. However, as he saw Grand Prince Liang moving aggressively to murder him, his gaze turned fierce. “You want to kill me? Hmph, then let us all die together! The Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang have been plotting for a long time to get rid of Prince Han. They even said that they want to gain control of the Royal Palace after killing Prince Han. They were planning to scare the officials into submission before usurping the throne. When the Emperor returns, they...”

The Crown Prince could no longer hide the battered look in his eyes. “Shut up! Utter nonsense!”

“I am speaking nonsense? Li Chengqian, you are a despicable person who can’t even tolerate your own biological brother. I have already been on guard against you. I did not burn the letter that you sent me. It is hidden in a house in Chang’an. General Linghu, if you don’t believe me, you can search and you will know everything.” Jisun Chenxin managed to escape death so many times because he was selfish. He had never truly pledged loyalty to anyone.

Linghu Deguan waved his hands and the Secret Army surrounded the Crown Prince, Grand Prince Liang and their men.

The Crown Prince shouted to no avail, “Linghu Deguan, how dare you be disrespectful to me?”

Prince Han shook his head. “We have both witnesses and evidence. Crown Prince, you should just stop. There are people heading to Eastern Palace and we will find even more witnesses and evidence.”

The Crown Prince’s expression changed drastically. “Prince Han, how dare you send people to barge into the Eastern Palace?” *How did things end up like this? Victory had been certain.*

“You dare to barge into the Royal Palace and attempt to kill me. I am

doing this for self-defense. I am sure Imperial Father will not blame me.” Prince Han was the true victor.

The Crown Prince bellowed, “You! I knew you were planning to betray me! If I didn’t kill you, you would have killed me!”

Linghu Deguan finally saw clearly what was happening. “Your Highness, this situation is of high importance, I have no choice but to be rude. Men, arrest the Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang.”

The Secret Guards dragged the Crown Prince and his group away.

Prince Han breathed a sigh of relief. “Luckily I made it in time. Xinnan ah, this time heavens was helping us. If I were any slower, the Crown Prince would have taken over the Royal Palace...” He turned around to look, only to see the two lovebirds, Xinnan and Sheng Chuling staring lovingly into each other's eyes.

Xinnan acted cute in front of Sheng Chuling. “How lucky. Just now, my heart was pounding so hard, it was about to jump out from my throat.”

Sheng Chuling acted manly. “With me to protect you, what are you afraid of?”

Hearts appeared in Xinnan’s eyes as she jumped into Sheng Chuling’s embrace. “I was not scared. It was because I saw how amazing you were. I was happy.”

Prince Han placed a palm on his forehead. “Oi! The two of you! Palace rules!”

The palace rules had flown up into the sky.

This scene was completely cut from the drama. For those drama watchers, I hope they read the novel! There were a lot of scenes missing from episode 46 and 47.

Court Lady

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Sun Lingshu held a wine cup in her hand. She was smiling widely as she stood in front of Fu Rou. “Court Lady Fu, back then I was grateful for you. If you did not help me alter my dance costume to become one that rained petals, I would not have become the Crown Princess.”

“Back then, you were a simple and innocent lady from the Sun family. I never thought that you had such a weak will. After you became the Crown Princess, you suffered a little setback and turned to walk the wrong road. You turned into a crazy woman. If Lu Yingying was the one who had entered the Eastern Palace, she would not have become like you. Because I did not like Lu Yunji, I helped you to defeat Lu Yingying. My selfish ways have caused harm to others, I am extremely regretful.” Fu Rou looked coldly at the smiling face in front of her, she was a complete stranger.

A cruel expression appeared on Sun Lingshu's face. “You are not allowed to talk about Lu Yingying! That despicable woman. She did not manage to seduce the Crown Prince so she sucked up to Imperial Mother and made Imperial Mother pressure me. She almost made the Crown Prince accept Lu Yingying as a concubine. His Highness can only have me in his heart, no one can steal His Highness' love! When the Crown Prince ascends the throne, I will be the Empress and I will kill that despicable woman!”

Fu Rou sighed, “You have really gone crazy.”

Sun Lingshu laughed out loud. “Isn’t the Royal Palace most suitable for crazy people? You are not as crazy as me. That’s why you are the one that will be dying.”

Two palace maids grabbed hold of Fu Rou. Sun Lingshu grabbed onto Fu Rou’s chin and was about to pour the poison wine into her mouth. A guard dashed into the room. “Crown Princess, bad news. The enemy has infiltrated the Eastern Palace...ah!”

The guard cried out miserably as a sword pierced through his chest. He then collapsed onto the floor, showing the person that killed him - Sheng Chumu.

“Sheng Chumu!” Seeing how he was safe and unharmed, Fu Rou immediately forgot about her surroundings as delight shone over her face.

When Sheng Chumu saw her he could not help but freeze. He never expected to see Fu Rou in the Eastern Palace.

Sun Lingshu pulled out a hairpin and pressed onto Fu Rou’s throat. She spoke viciously, “Sheng Chumu, how dare you enter the Eastern Palace. When the Crown Prince returns, you shall die!”

Sheng Chumu smirked, pretending to be calm as he mocked, “Are you sure that the Crown Prince can return? The Crown Prince has gone insane and secretly sent people to assassinate Prince Han. However, since I am now in the Eastern Palace, where do you think Prince Han is?”

Sun Lingshu was frenzied. “Prince Han...he should be...” *She had definitely seen the signal. Prince Han should be dead!*

Fu Rou felt Sun Lingshu panic and immediately struggled.

Sun Lingshu became alert and the end of the hairpin cut Fu Rou’s neck. “Stop moving or I will kill you!”

Sheng Chumu was startled but maintained the same expression. “Prince Han has gone to the Royal Palace. The Crown Prince is also at the Royal Palace now. Do you want to know what Prince Han did to the Crown Prince?”

Sun Lingshu knew that something must have changed. "I want to see the Crown Prince. Bring the Crown Prince back to the Eastern Palace right now. If not, the woman you love will die before your very eyes!"

Sheng Chumu pretended not to care. "She used to be the woman I loved. But that is not the case anymore."

Sun Lingshu did not believe him. "Who are you lying to? If you did not care about her, you would have fought your way in already. Why would you still be talking?"

"Sigh, although we have cut off all relationships, we once had a past. If you want to kill her, go ahead. At most, I will help her take revenge. Kill her and I will kill your son." He stretched his hand out and showed a bundled baby. The reason why he bothered talking so much to Sun Lingshu was actually to buy time. He was waiting for Ye Qiulang to bring the Imperial Grandson over.

"Xiang'er!" Sun Lingshu was so shocked she seemed to lose control. "Return my child back to me or I will kill her!"

"Dream on." Sheng Chumu caught her off guard as he threw the doll behind him.

Sun Lingshu ran out without caring about anything. As she saw her son in Ye Qiulang's arms, she knew it was too late. She had fallen into their trap. She was restrained by Zong Jianxiu.

Fu Rou opened her mouth but did not know where to start. As she saw Sheng Chumu walk to her with her solemn face, she thought that he was going to treat her coldly again. However, he suddenly hugged her.

"I am useless. Even if I make ten thousand resolutions and cut myself ten thousand times to break it off with you, I still cannot help but dream of you. When I see you being restrained by others, I was so scared that my soul left my body. You made a u-turn at death's door, it is as if you were reborn. Can we forget about everything that happened in the past?" Sheng Chumu spoke what he truly felt.

However, Fu Rou pushed him away and looked back at the box by the corner. Her eyes were filled with sorrow.

Sheng Chumu rambled on, "The Eastern Palace is finished, the power struggle in Chang'an is stable now. The sky has cleared after the rain. Be it Prince Zhou or Yan Zifang, they can go to hell. Rou'er, don't lie to me anymore and I will not upset you anymore. Let us return to the past. Let us go back to how we were in Guangzhou. Can we live the rest of our lives in happiness? I know that I was absurd in the past and made many mistakes. But I really can't live without you. After going through so many hardships, can you give me another chance? Oh right, Lian Yan'er, I really have nothing on with her."

He pulled her hand, wanting to leave the room. However, she tugged lightly on his hand.

"Rou'er, is there something wrong?" *Was he too late in asking for forgiveness?*

Fu Rou brought Sheng Chumu to the front of the box. His eyes became fixed on Chujun's lifeless face.

Lu Yingying assessed her surroundings. She was in a desolated mountain area. She grew more and more suspicious as she pulled on the reins. "Yan Zifang, where is my brother?"

Yan Zifang had gone to the Liang Residence to look for her. He said that Lu Qi and Sheng Chumu had fallen out and had fought. Yan Zifang said that Lu Qi was injured and even took out his jade pendant and a letter. She was worried about her brother's injury and followed Yan Zifang out of the city.

Yan Zifang did not say much as he pointed to the front. "You will see him after you turn that corner."

Lu Yingying decided to trust him one more time as she turned onto the mountain road. She saw a wooden hut amongst the forest. She breathed out and rode to the hut. As soon as she dismounted, she ran into the hut.

“Brother! Brother!” There was no one on the outside, she ran further inside. However, she did not see any sign of Lu Qi.

When she turned around, she saw Yan Zifang close the door. She immediately became alarmed. “You lied to me?”

“I lied to you. The truth is your brother is not injured. At this moment, he should have already left Chang’an. However, I only saved Lu Qi, because I like you and I can’t watch him die.” *Fu Rou said before that his actions were still that of the pirate. He admitted to it and he would not change.*

Lu Yingying walked around Yan Zifang and headed for the door.

Yan Zifang did not hold her back. “Yingying, Grand Prince Liang is not going to survive. You are safe here.”

Lu Yingying turned back sharply. “What did you say?”

Yan Zifang replied, “Grand Prince Liang colluded with the Crown Prince to rebel. He is going to be executed for attempting to rebel.” Moreover, he was the one that sent the letter to the Emperor and he spoke very badly of Grand Prince Liang. Grand Prince Liang’s future was set.

“Rebel?” Lu Yingying thought back on Grand Prince Liang’s behaviour the past few days. He had indeed been behaving quite strangely. Moreover, the Crown Prince and Prince Han’s struggle was open.

She muttered to herself, “Grand Prince Liang, how can you be so foolish...” The Emperor agreed to let him stay in Chang’an as long as he did not create trouble. He could have had a peaceful life.

“The Emperor already knows about the Crown Prince and Grand Prince Liang’s plot to murder Prince Han. He is rushing back from the Hot Spring Palace. When the Emperor is back, he will punish the rebels. When that time comes, I am afraid that the entire Chang’an will be dyed red. Grand Prince Liang’s household will also be implicated.”

Lu Yingying headed towards the door again. Yan Zifang could not

help but hold her back. “Where are you going?”

She did not turn back. “I am returning to the Liang Residence.”

“A couple is like a pair of birds. When trouble comes, they will fly their own way. Moreover, you were forced to marry Grand Prince Liang! Did you forget what a despicable man he is? Did you forget how he tortured you in his residence? What about the scars on your body? Have you forgotten about those?” He really could not understand. “And don’t you like me?”

She pulled her hand with all her might. “Let go of me!”

“In order to save you, I have been extremely busy. However, you are willing to die with a man that abuses you.” He was not willing to let go, anger burning in his eyes. “Aren’t you hateful?”

“Who is the one that is hateful?” She found it funny. “Back then, I begged you earnestly but you did not care about anything. Now that I am married, you are trying all ways and means to get me back. You’re the hateful one, Yan Zifang! That’s right, I did not want to marry Grand Prince Liang but I could not disobey the Imperial Decree. Where were you when I had no choice but to force myself to smile and marry into the Liang Residence? Grand Prince Liang has done many wrongdoings, but he is finally repentant. He is starting to know how to treasure things. I am trying my best to be a wife and I don’t want to betray him when he is at his lowest point. What is wrong with that?”

“You are always thinking about others, but have you thought about yourself? Do you really want to be Grand Prince Liang’s wife? Then why do you try every way to not remain in the same room as him? You are deceiving yourself!”

Lu Yingying was horrified and embarrassed. She slapped Yan Zifang. “How dare you...pry into other people’s privacy.”

Yan Zifang’s expression did not change. “To know yourself is to know your enemy. That is how you can defeat them. Ever since Grand Prince Liang married you, he became my enemy.”

As he spoke, he took off his belt. She became frantic, “What are you trying to do? Yan Zifang, if you dare to violate me, I will bite my tongue and commit suicide!”

He carried her and pressed her down onto the bed. Using his belt, he tied her wrist to the bedpost. He wanted to laugh but did not. “At this point in time, how can I have crooked thoughts?” He then turned serious. “It is dangerous out there. You have to stay here.”

She blushed and could only attack him with words. “I hate you!”

He accepted it calmly. “I deserve it.”

Court Lady

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Sheng Chumu barged into the Internal Attendant Department and demanded to know where Sun Lingshu was. He held a long sword in his hand aggressively and no one dared to block him.

As soon as Fu Rou heard the news, she rushed over. Sheng Chumu glared at her. "Court Lady Fu, hand over the Crown Princess."

He was always the dumb one, always thinking of being with her and passing their days simply and happily. He never cared about whether he offended others. She was the smart one, always assessing the situation. She talked about pompous rules, handed things smoothly and made everyone like her. *How could she always stand on the opposite side of him, siding with his enemy?*

"The Crown Princess is part of the Royal family. Imperial Concubine Wang and the Emperor will be the ones punishing her. Neither the Ministry of War nor the Ministry of Justice is allowed to interfere. These are the rules." She understood his anger but she could not let him make a mistake. *She had to protect him!*

"The palace rules can go to hell! That vicious woman poisoned her own sister and made my sister the scapegoat, causing her death. To cover up her crimes, she killed my younger brother. Why are you still protecting her?" *He had fallen in love with a heartless woman, maybe it was time he woke up.* "Move aside, she must pay with her life!"

“Even if we ignore palace rules, there is still < < Great Tang’s laws > >. You can’t punish someone for your own personal reasons. The Crown Princess has committed crimes of murder. But if you kill her, you are committing a crime as well. Even though it is understandable, the law will not permit it. I don’t want you to make a mistake in a moment of rashness.” *She wished that he could understand her.*

“You talk all about the laws and rules as if you were thinking for me. It is actually because you want to continue being the Court Lady of the Six Offices. You want to protect the power that you spent so much effort to achieve. You want everyone to know that what you say goes!” Anger filled his head as he spoke irresponsibly. “Fu Rou, tell me the truth. We have known each other for so long. Have you ever treated me wholeheartedly? Do you care about how I feel? If you care even a little bit, then you should know how I am feeling and let me through.”

“I can’t allow you to enter.” *Because this was a path of no return.*

“Are you going to move?” He pulled out his sword.

“No!” She was going to use her life to protect him.

Sheng Chumu gritted his teeth, he was about to strike out when the door to the Internal Attendant Department opened.

Prince Han walked out of the room in a daze. The white silk that he was holding fell to the ground. He smiled through the tears streaming down his face. “Consort, this time, I did not let you down...” He muttered to himself as he walked past Sheng Chumu and Fu Rou.

A female official peered her head in and shrieked, “The Crown Princess is dead!”

Sheng Chumu snorted as he followed Prince Han out. Fu Rou was stunned for a moment before she let out a long sigh. With Prince Han’s move, it will cause trouble to never end.

When the Emperor rushed back to Chang’an, he saw that everything

had been sorted. At the same time, he was heartened that Prince Han did not hurt the Crown Prince on account of their brotherhood. However, he hated his oldest son. In the end, the Crown Prince had disappointed him again.

The Crown Prince was locked in a side room. When he saw the Emperor arrive, he remained in a daze.

The Emperor was furious. "Not only are you so foolish you cannot recognise your own brother, now you can't recognise your father as well?"

It was only then did the Crown Prince limp over to kneel. His vision looked delayed. "Greetings, Imperial Father."

"I came because I want to understand. Out of everyone, you are the one person that should not have thought of rebelling! You are already the Crown Prince, why did you have to do it? Did you really want to push me to the edge and kill me before you are satisfied? Or tell me. Did someone frame you or wronged you again this time? I promise that I will investigate thoroughly!"

"There is no need." The Crown Prince chuckled bitterly, "I just could not stand Prince Han and wanted to kill my own younger brother. I am getting rid of the thorn in my eye and Chang'an is within my control. After all, I am the Crown Prince. Shouldn't I just go all the way to take the country? If I killed Prince Han, you would not have forgiven me. I might as well continue and take the next step to become the ruler of the world."

"You!" The Emperor was in disbelief. "You really wanted to commit regicide?"

"No matter how cruel I am, I will not kill my own father. I just wanted to control the state. When Imperial Father returns, I would have bestowed the position of Grand Emperor on you. You would have lived the rest of your days in luxury. Didn't I learn this from you?" *Such a father will have such a son.*

The Emperor was burning with anger as he slapped the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince laughed bitterly. "I am neither loyal nor filial. I am wicked beyond redemption, you did not have to hit me yourself. You can just end me by granting me poison wine. I, Li Chengqian, was born in Chengqian Palace by Empress Zhangsun. When I was an infant, I was already given the title Prince Hengshan. When I was eight, I became the Crown Prince. I was tutored by the best scholar, nurtured in < <Poetry> > and < <Etiquette> >. How did I end up like this? I am already the Crown Prince, why did I have to rebel? Who was the one that forced me to this point?"

He suddenly hugged the Emperor's leg and wept bitter tears, "I have committed an unforgivable crime and can only be punished by death. Imperial Father, please forgive the Crown Princess and Xiang'er on account of our father and son relationship. Prince Han hates me to the core. After I die, he will definitely hurt my wife. However, they are your daughter-in-law and grandson. Imperial Father, please protect them!"

The Emperor's eyes were filled with unexplainable sorrow. "Do you know what hurts me the most? Up till this point, you have never truly repented. You are still suspecting and plotting against your younger brother. Prince Han is kind and tolerant but he almost died in your hands. However, even after he took control of Chang'an, he has not hurt a single strand of your hair. How can someone like that hurt your wife just because you lost power? Li Chengqian, your suspicious nature was the one that made you overly fearful and treat everyone as your enemy. It is how you ended up like this!"

The Crown Prince muttered, "Was I the one that always suspected and wronged him? I hope so. I hope he is not as evil and heartless as I thought. If he lets my wife live, I am willing to cut open my heart to apologise to him. Imperial Father, I have no future. Before I die, I would like to see the Crown Princess and Xiang'er one last time. Please have mercy, Imperial Father. Please have mercy."

The Emperor looked at the Crown Prince begging him piteously. He could not stand it. The pain in his heart was incomparable. He never expected that his clever and quick-witted child would end up like this. He was now fickle and pathetic, going on wild goose chases. He really wished that he could know the reason and do everything over again.

After leaving the Crown Prince, the Emperor was feeling vexed as he went to find Concubine Yan. Concubine Yan's considerate side could always cure him. He was heartened to see Prince Zhou emerging from this disturbance, still as a kind soul focused on writing farming articles.

The Emperor sighed, "Chengqian used to be so smart and filial. He used to cherish his brothers and received support from the ministers. They all said that he would become a brilliant ruler in the future. The Empress and I had so many expectations for him but they have all turned to nothing now."

"Everyone is sad by the fact that the Crown Prince turned out like this. However, please do not be too upset, Your Majesty. You are a wise ruler and a kind father. Everyone knows your love for the Crown Prince and your sincere teachings to him." Concubine Yan's encouragement was like a poison seed covered in honey. Now, the seed had sprouted. "He is the one that did not live up to your expectations and let you down."

"While I was recuperating, I thought hard about this. Ever since the death of that actor, Chen Ji, the Crown Prince seemed to have changed into a different person. The Crown Prince has his faults, but did I make a mistake too? If I did not force him to kill Chen Ji, would he not have harboured so much resentment in his heart? To the point where he became more and more prejudiced and ended up to where he is today?"

At this moment, a palace maid came up to serve tea. The Emperor saw the scar on her wrist.

The Emperor was startled. "Why do you have a scar on your hand?"

The palace maid was hesitant. When she finally wanted to speak, Concubine Yan stopped her, "Jin'er, watch your mouth. Leave us."

The Emperor was unhappy. "Can't I ask her things?"

Concubine Yan sought his forgiveness. "I was disrespectful. Please

forgive me, Your Majesty. However, I saw that you had a lot of troubles on your mind. I am afraid that you would become even more unhappy if you have to hear trivial matters.”

The Emperor muttered to himself, “Seeing how you would speak up to stop her, it must not be a trivial matter.” He asked the palace maid once more, “Tell me, where did you get that scar?”

The palace maid kneeled. “Your Majesty, I was caned by the Crown Prince’s subordinate. That day, the Crown Prince brought a lot of people with him and he barged in aggressively, asking where Her Highness and Prince Zhou were. He thought that I was hiding something from him and ordered his man to cane me to force me to speak.”

An angry look immediately appeared on the Emperor’s face. “Forcing you to tell him where Concubine Yan and Prince Zhou were? What did he want to do? Could he not even tolerate someone like Concubine Yan, who has nothing to do with anything, and Prince Zhou, his younger brother that fully knows his own place?” He then answered his own question, “That’s right, he can’t even tolerate his own biological brother.”

Concubine Yan pretended to rebuke. “Jin’er, you spoke too much.”

The palace maid kowtowed. “I have made a mistake. Your Majesty, although the situation was dangerous then, Her Highness and Prince Zhou were coincidentally not in the palace and managed to escape. This is all because of Your Majesty’s blessing. Oh right, Your Majesty’s blessing also protected Princess Xinnan, that’s how Princess Xinnan could also be blessed. Your Majesty is the most fortunate person on earth...”

“Enough, His Majesty is naturally the most blessed person.” Concubine Yan then came to the main point. “Princess Xinnan managed to escape misfortune all because of Prince Han. Prince Han had long ago placed guards around the Princess to protect her. He also rushed back in time to prevent the Crown Prince from harming the Princess. This is all Prince Han’s love for his younger sister.”

The palace maid had been instructed by Concubine Yan. “But since

Prince Han knew that the Crown Prince was going to barge into the palace and could arrange for guards to protect the princess, why couldn't he arrange for people to protect Your Highness and Prince Zhou? Princess Xinnan is Prince Han's younger sister but isn't Prince Zhou his brother as well?"

True enough, the Emperor's face changed.

Concubine Yan reprimanded, "Keep quiet! How dare a palace maid like you criticise a prince? If you dare to say anything more, I will slap your mouth. Aren't you going to leave!"

The palace maid left.

Concubine Yan kneeled down. "Your Majesty, the palace maid's words were inappropriate and it is my fault for not teaching her well. Please punish me, Your Majesty."

Li Shimin helped Concubine Yan to stand. "I never thought that my trip to the Hot Spring Palace made me almost lose the Crown Prince and Prince Han. More than that, it almost made bystanders like you and Prince Zhou suffer. I had been touched by Prince Han's kindness. He showed concern to the Crown Prince and Xinnan... but why did he ignore Prince Zhou when he knew there was danger?"

"Your Majesty, you are too harsh on Prince Han. Prince Han and the Crown Prince were both born by the Empress. The Empress has also raised Xinnan from young. Their relationship is naturally different. Prince Zhou is my son and he is not more important than anyone else. In such a precarious situation, it is understandable that Prince Han did not care about Prince Zhou."

"Ridiculous!" The Emperor fumed, "Prince Zhou is my beloved son, who said that he is not important? When Prince Han enters the palace, I have to question him."

"You must not!" Concubine Yan silently celebrated her success. "Aren't I and Prince Zhou safe? Moreover, the Crown Prince created such a big mess in Chang'an, it is all thanks to Prince Han that everything is fine. Prince Han had made such a huge contribution, Your Majesty should be rewarding him. You should not make Prince

Han unhappy just because of Prince Zhou.”

At this moment, Chief Cao came to receive the Emperor. The Emperor expressed that he wanted to eat with Concubine Yan. However, he recalled the Crown Prince’s request and ordered that no one was to make things difficult for the Crown Princess and the Imperial Grandson.

In a flash, everyone’s expression had a subtle change.

The Emperor did not miss it and asked Chief Cao what was going on. Chief Cao bowed and reported, “Your Majesty, the Crown Princess is dead.”

The Emperor was shocked. “Dead? How?”

Chief Cao replied, “From what I heard, Prince Han barged into the Internal Attendant Department before Your Majesty returned to the capital and personally...strangled the Crown Princess.”

A wave of dizziness overcame the Emperor. In a fit of anger, he could not distinguish between right and wrong. He blamed Chief Cao, “How did you manage the Internal Attendant Department? How could you let Prince Han enter and commit such a huge crime?”

Concubine Yan rushed to help speak up for him. “Chief Cao was waiting upon you in the Hot Spring Palace. The Internal Attendant Department was managed by Court Lady Fu. The Crown Princess’ death cannot be blamed on Chief Cao. I heard that when Prince Han killed the Crown Princess, Court Lady Fu was present. I heard that after the incident, not only did she let Prince Han go, she even ordered the female officials to not tell anyone about what happened.”

The Emperor became slightly more composed. “Summon Court Lady Fu, I want to question her.”

Chief Cao went to carry out his orders.

In the drama, the Crown Princess supposedly committed suicide. It doesn't make sense to me though. Why would she commit suicide when she's so prideful and despicable?

The drama was initially supposed to be 69 episodes but they shortened it to 55. I noticed many, many scenes have been cut. It's good that you guys are reading instead!! <3

Court Lady

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Fu Rou entered and greeted the Emperor. She knew that the Emperor was bound to summon her and hence she was calm.

However, under instigation by Concubine Yan, the Emperor was suspicious whether Fu Rou had bent the law for her personal relationships. Before she arrived, he had called for several witnesses from the Internal Attendant Department. He wanted to see if her answer was consistent.

The Emperor asked, "Court Lady Fu, the Crown Princess died in the Internal Attendant Department that you were managing. Do you know about it?"

"Yes." Fu Rou was honest.

The Emperor then asked, "How did she die?"

"The Crown Princess was killed by Prince Han." Fu Rou did not hesitate.

The Emperor asked again, "Prince Han is kind and has always respected the Crown Prince and Crown Princess. Did he intentionally kill the Crown Princess?"

Fu Rou was composed. "Prince Han did it intentionally. He used a white silk to strangle the Crown Princess to take revenge for Consort

Han. After investigating, I found out that the weapon used to kill the Crown Princess was brought into the palace by Prince Han. From this, we know that Prince Han had the intention to kill when he went to look for the Crown Princess.”

Concubine Yan blurted out, “At that time, why did you give the order to not let anyone know about this. Were you trying to help Prince Han cover up? Are you trying to hide something from His Majesty?”

“Your Highness must be joking.” Fu Rou looked at Concubine Yan before turning back to the Emperor. “I was instructed by Empress Zhangsun to manage the Six Offices and serve His Majesty and the various nobility. I only want to do my duties conscientiously. The truth is whatever it is. I will not try to help Prince Han cover up nor hide anything from Your Majesty. As for the order, I did not want others to know that the Crown Prince’s younger brother killed his sister-in-law. If this news were to spread, it would ruin the royal family’s reputation and hurt Your Majesty’s character.”

Concubine Yan opened her mouth but did not say anything.

Fu Rou retrieved a document. “Your Majesty, before you returned to the capital, I have written down whatever I saw and heard on the ninth. I have also written in detail about the Crown Princess’ death and the written confessions of various palace personnel. I have brought this document with me, and from this, it can prove that I did not have any intention to hide anything.”

Yu He laughed, “You could have written it at the last minute, how can it count for anything? Court Lady Fu, how can you prove that this was written before His Majesty returned to the capital?”

Fu Rou abided, “I wonder if Chief Yu would then believe Imperial Concubine Wang’s testimony?”

Yu He was silent.

“Your Majesty, I have made two copies of this document. One copy was left in the Six Offices for Your Majesty to investigate at any time. The other copy had been sent to Imperial Concubine Wang a long time ago. If you still suspect that I have the intention to hide things

from you or change the content at the last minute, we can retrieve the other copy from Imperial Concubine Wang and compare the two. If there is a single word that does not match, I am willing to accept death as my punishment.”

Wei Song entered carrying a document in his hands. “Your Majesty, Imperial Concubine Wang heard that you were investigating the Crown Princess’ death and recalled a document sent from the Six Offices. This document detailed whatever happened and instructed me to send this over. Additionally, Imperial Concubine Wang said that the Crown Princess had initially been locked up elsewhere. However, Court Lady Fu was worried that someone would harm the Crown Princess and requested Imperial Concubine Wang to permit the Crown Princess to be detained in the Internal Attendant Department. Imperial Concubine Wang gave permission and the Crown Princess was transferred. Unfortunately, things didn't go as one wished. However, Court Lady Fu already tried her best for the Crown Princess.”

The Emperor compared both documents; every single word matched.

“Court Lady Fu, it is written here that you had gone to the Eastern Palace and was almost killed by the Crown Princess. Why are you still protecting the Crown Princess then?” The Emperor could not understand.

Fu Rou reported, “I want her to live to be punished according to Great Tang’s laws. Criminals should not be killed in the dark. They should outrightly receive their punishment to warn everyone else. This was the ending that I wished for the Crown Princess.”

The Emperor had a sudden realisation. “After so long, you did not side with Prince Han even when he was in power but still continued to do your duty and protect the Crown Princess.”

“It is my duty and also what the Empress would have wanted me to do.”

The Emperor was heartened. “The Empress did not judge you wrongly. You can go.”

Fu Rou left.

Concubine Yan's expression darkened as she gave Yu He a look. Yu He silently took his leave. He called for his trusted internal attendant, Zhi He, and whispered to him. Zhi He rushed off.

Zhi He arrived at the side room the Crown Prince was in and greeted the Crown Prince from the window.

Zhi He spoke, "In the past, I broke a rule and had to be caned twenty times. You happened to walk past and spoke up for me. It was only then that Chief Cao let me go."

The Crown Prince did not remember and only laughed bitterly. "What are you here for? Things are very different now. In the past when you were down, I could speak up for you. But now that I am down, who can speak up for me? Leave."

Zhi He sighed, "Your Highness, even though the Crown Princess is dead you cannot..."

The Crown Prince was shocked. "What did you say? What happened to the Crown Princess?"

"Your Highness does not know? On the second day that the Crown Princess was locked in the Internal Attendant Department, Prince Han strangled her to death." Zhi He did as Yu He instructed and came to instigate the Crown Prince.

It was as if the Crown Prince had been struck by lightning as he gritted his teeth. "Prince Han! You are insane and will die a horrible death!"

Zhi He then sighed again. "I wanted to go and see the Imperial Grandson but they were watching him closely and I could not see him. However, I heard that the Imperial Grandson has been crying nonstop and his nannies are threatening him. I am afraid..."

The Crown Prince paced around anxiously. "No matter what, Xiang'er is Prince Han's nephew, how can he be so heartless! What must I do

to make him let my son go?"

"Prince Han's subordinates said that Your Highness wanted to kill your own brother and usurp the throne. You were heinous. Now that your crime has been exposed, you should have died. However, you continue to live without a sense of honour. Therefore, Prince Han wants you to watch helplessly as your wife and son are maltreated. He wants you to feel pain that is worse than death...Your Highness, no matter what, you have to protect yourself." Zhi He left.

The Crown Prince fell onto a chair as he cried out in sorrow and frustration. "Prince Han, Imperial Father said that you were kind for not killing me. How are you kind? You are more vicious than a poisonous snake! Since you are known to be kind, you can grandly become the new Crown Prince. Why must you use such despicable means to kill my wife, torture my son and force me to die? Fine. My death will not be a pity. Today, your brother, I, will give my life to you!"

The Crown Prince bit onto his finger and wrote three lines on the wall using his blood -- Prince Han killed his sister-in-law. Prince Han oppresses my child. Prince Han forces his own brother to die. He then looked at the roof above him.

The Crown Prince is so =_=. He easily believes random people and doesn't use his brain. Sigh.

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Fu Rou was amending documents and could not sit still. She walked out of the room and looked at the sky.

The Crown Prince had attempted to commit suicide by hanging himself. Although he was saved, he had left a blood letter saying that Prince Han had killed his wife and was bullying his child. Prince Han had pushed him to the edge. The Emperor was extremely shocked. The Emperor also found out that there were people queuing up in front of the Han Mansion and there was a never-ending stream of guests delivering gifts. This caused the Emperor to become furious. He issued an Imperial Decree admonishing him. He scolded Prince Han for being arrogant and disappointing the Emperor. Prince Han was then punished to self-reflection. Everything that he was in charge of was to be handed over to Prince Zhou. The Literature School was instructed to close as well. As soon as this decree was issued, there was a commotion in court. Hundreds of ministers could not understand the Emperor's unpredictable changes.

Fu Rou recalled what happened earlier on when she met the Emperor. Concubine Yan and Yu He had been pressuring her. Ever since Consort Han's incident, she had changed her opinion of Concubine Yan.

Everyone in the palace knew that Concubine Yan was highly favoured. She always handled things according to Buddhist teachings.

Yet, the Empress was always wary of her and this made the Empress seem ungenerous. Today, Fu Rou thought that the Empress' intuition was right. Concubine Yan was just very good at tolerating and looked as if she did not fight for anything. She could remain silent for three years, but as soon as she made a move, she would achieve the world overnight.

Today, Concubine Yan had wanted to tie her up with Prince Han. It seemed like she no longer wanted to hide. If she had not been well-prepared, wouldn't she have ended up like Prince Han?

She did not understand why everything could not simply be handled by rules and decrees. In the morning, Prince Han had been praised for being kind and filial. But as soon as night fell, he became arrogant. Why was the Emperor in charge of ruling the world yet his own family matters were a mess? Right and wrong was becoming muddled. However, she understood that if she always stood up for everything, very soon, she would not be able to stand.

Deep within her, she was still selfish. She wanted to leave this dog-eat-dog place. Hence, sticking to her principles was her limit and she was not going to knock her head into the wall.

Boom, boom, boom. The sound of footsteps neared.

"Your Highness." Fu Rou did not turn to know that it was Xinnan.

Perhaps, the person she admired most would be this princess. She could truly be herself, love whoever she wanted and fight for what she wanted. She operated on the most basic right or wrong and moved according to the kindness of her heart.

"What did you say to Imperial Father?" Xinnan was fuming.

"The truth." She was protecting herself and protecting others. Even if she can't see the benefit now.

"Truth, truth. Do you think you are Great Tang's justice turned into a person? Sanctimonious! Imperial Father declared that the Literature School was to be closed and took away all of Fourth Brother's power. Fourth Brother is now under house arrest and Han Mansion has

turned into a prison. This is all because of you!" In Xinnan's eyes, Fu Rou was supposed to be on their side.

"I caused it?" It was rare that Fu Rou got angry.

No one understood her! Sheng Chumu thought that she was hungry for power and did not allow him to kill the Crown Princess. Now Xinnan is blaming her for harming Prince Han. No one ever thought that if they listened to her from the beginning, things would not have turned out like this!

"Yes! You!" Xinnan was not thinking, she only wanted someone to take responsibility.

"Was I the one that instigated Prince Han to kill the Crown Princess?" Fu Rou had to argue back.

"...No." Xinnan stammered.

"Was I the one that gave Prince Han the white silk?"

"..." Xinnan swallowed, "No."

"Then how is it that I am the one that harmed him and not that he harmed himself?" *Did they think they could bully her?*

Xinnan got scared by her interrogation. "You...you knew that Fourth Brother killed the Crown Princess because the Crown Princess killed Consort Han. Fourth Brother could not stand seeing the person that killed his wife continue living and was feeling pain. That was why he lost control and killed her. He had no choice."

"The Crown Princess' sister, Sun Lingwei, had been killed personally by the Crown Princess. The Crown Princess poisoned her jujube cakes with arsenic. What do you think the Crown Princess was thinking when she killed her own sister?"

"How...how would I know?" Xinnan could not hold her off.

"She must have been thinking that Consort Han was her enemy. Seeing Consort Han continue living must have caused her immense pain. She could not control herself and had to think of a way to get

rid of Consort Han. Even if the price she had to pay was her sister's life, it would not be a pity. The Crown Princess also felt helpless. Everyone that kills will have their own reason to kill."

"You are being unreasonable." *Xinnan did not for a moment think that she was the unreasonable one.* "I finally see through you! You are together with Concubine Yan!"

"Concubine Yan says that I am with Prince Han and now you are saying that I am with Concubine Yan. Your Highness, with the Empress' soul watching from heaven, I will never be on anyone's side. It is because of this fighting and scheming that people are divided. Not caring whether anything is right or wrong, they attack each other, causing even biological brothers to attempt to kill each other. Both sides are suffering. I only hope that both the Crown Prince and Prince Han have learnt a lesson and go back on the right path. They should not let the Empress down anymore." *And she only wished to leave this place forever.*

"You only know how to talk about principles. Hypocritical!" Xinnan knew that she was right but she was biased towards kindness.

"What is wrong with principles? When did staying as a proper person, not lying to the Emperor, not helping people cover up their crimes become a hypocritical act? One lie requires ten other lies to cover. Ten lies would then need a never-ending number of lies to cover up. After killing the first person, you have to kill a second person to cover up. Then the third. The number of crimes will multiply to the point where there is no way to make up for it. Initially, the Crown Princess was kind as well. How did she turn into a cruel murderer that would kill even her own sister? It is because she took the wrong first step and did not know how to repent. She kept on doing one wrong deed after the other! Prince Han killed the Crown Princess and took the first wrong step. If I help him cover up, he will continue to do wrong. Will he follow the Crown Princess' disastrous path? You are not helping him, you are harming him!" *Only by facing the truth can one find the cure.*

Xinnan was completely intimidated by her, "Why...why are you so fierce for? What happened to the rules? I am the princess."

“Prince Han made a mistake. His Majesty knows it and has punished him. Things will end here and it should be a good thing. At least it is better than covering it up with paper and having the paper catch fire later on. It is better than getting punished for deceiving the Emperor.” *She was not born as a noble. No matter how much reason she spoke, she was just like a gust of wind. She could not control the ending.*

“You are good. I cannot argue against you. I just don’t understand. If you like someone, why can’t you do everything for him?” Xinnan shook her head and turned to leave. “If it were for Chuling, I would throw caution to the wind.”

Fu Rou was finally silent. *She already knew Sheng Chumu would hate her even more after this.*

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Sheng Chumu nimbly climbed up a tree and looked over the tall wall. He saw Prince Han sit by himself at the stone table, drinking wine. He looked to be free of worries. Sheng Chumu finally relaxed. He retrieved a small jug of wine from his waist. Leaning back against the tree branch, he started to drink.

This morning, the Emperor had rewarded a bunch of people and he was included. However, he was unhappy. His sister and Chujun were no longer around. What meaning would another title and more rewards have?

After thinking through everything that had happened, he felt that there was something still amiss. Both the Crown Prince and Prince Han had suffered immensely.

Prince Han suddenly muttered to himself, "For my consort, I hate my own brother to the core. I finally beat him but realised the true conspirator was the Crown Princess." He chuckled to himself, "Crown Princess, you deserve to die! You poisoned your own sister, framed my consort and instigated the Crown Prince and me to kill each other. Don't you think you deserve to die? But Crown Princess, why did you have to do all these evil deeds? I have never ever thought of becoming the Crown Prince. Never!"

Sheng Chumu coughed and dug his ear. *Why does this Brother-in-law*

talk so loudly to himself?

Prince Han heard him and shook his head, standing up. "Imperial Father reprimanded me and said that I was inhuman and lacked virtue to kill my own sister-in-law. So what if I lack virtue? After all, I never thought of becoming the Crown Prince and don't care about my reputation. If I were to be given another chance, I would still kill her and take revenge for my consort. But although I have taken revenge, I will never be able to drink the soup that my consort made ever again. If you have someone you love, you must treasure them. Fighting, jealousy, disagreements are nothing big. As long as the person you like is still alive, you will have a chance to meet. That is a huge blessing. Do you understand?"

No one replied to him.

Prince Han decided to just shout, "Chumu, did you hear me?" *He knew that he was on the tree.*

Sheng Chumu could not help but speak. "Brother-in-law, lower your voice. You have been punished by the Emperor to be in house arrest. If you alert the guards watching over you, your punishment will be harsher."

Prince Han did not care. "I am now a broken jar, they can punish me however they like. I am telling you, don't bear a grudge on Court Lady Fu. She stopped you from killing the Crown Princess for your own good. I am the son of the Empress and after doing all that, I ended up like this. If you were the one that took action, you would have been executed. Court Lady Fu saved you. She must still have you in her heart."

Sheng Chumu drank his wine. After everything had settled, he could see things clearly but he could not turn back.

"Xinnan sent a letter. She scolded Court Lady Fu and said Court Lady Fu exposed me to Imperial Father and that is why I am being punished now. Xinnan is a silly girl. Imperial Father is wise, even if we can hide the Crown Princess' death from him for a day, we will not be able to hide it from him forever. I will admit to the things I have done. No one has to help me cover up. Court Lady Fu cannot be

blamed for this.” This was Prince Han’s heartfelt sentiments. “Chumu, I can no longer help you in the future. You have to take care of yourself. Remember, nothing else is as important as the fact that both you and the person you love is alive.”

Sheng Chumu finally spoke, “So what if we are alive? Every time we see each other, we hurt each other. Since you are alright, it is late and I am going back to sleep.”

The tree leaves rustled and slowly stopped moving.

“Pain? What do you know of pain? Drinking by myself everyday, worrying that I will grow old alone. I am afraid one day I will not even be able to recall the way she looks when she smiles. That is true pain.” Prince Han smiled drunkenly, “Consort, come and drink with me. Imperial Father has locked the Han Mansion. It is okay, I have already left instructions. The beauty ointments will still be sent daily. It is actually good that the door is locked. With the door locked, I won’t go anywhere. I will accompany you. If only I had accompanied you that day, who would have dared to hurt you? Who could have forced you to drink the poison wine ah--”

The smiling face turned to a crying one. Tears flowed down his face.

Fu Rou heard that Concubine Yan was unconscious and personally brought two female imperial physicians as soon as possible. The Emperor had rushed to visit Concubine Yan as well and praised Fu Rou for being considerate. He then asked Yu He what happened.

Yu He replied, “Her Highness was having tea with other noble ladies. Other than the noble ladies, palace maids and internal attendants were present as well. There were at least twenty people present and she fainted after a short while.”

The Emperor asked what tea they were having.

“They were having Her Highness’ favourite Yang Purple Bamboo Shoot Tea. She drinks it at least once a day.” Yu He’s tone became slightly more serious. “Before Her Highness fainted, she was just

telling Concubine Qiao how they added licorice root in the tea.”

The imperial physician made an “Aiya” sound. “Your Majesty, I understand now. The licorice root must have been what made Her Highness unconscious. Licorice root is said to be able to replenish vital energy, clear internal heat and detoxify. However, licorice root also has a toxic side. Moreover, Her Highness frequently has phlegm and should abstain from having licorice root.”

The Emperor blamed Yu He, “Foolish! You actually used licorice root in the tea. Is this how you serve Concubine Yan?”

Yu He knelt down. “Please calm down, Your Majesty! Using licorice root to brew tea was a recipe given by others. Because Your Majesty was the one that gave Her Highness the Yang Purple Bamboo Shoot Tea, Her Highness treasured it greatly. She said that brewing it normally would not be enough. Who would have known that a tea brewing recipe will contain something that hurt Her Highness? I was not careful, I deserve to die!”

Yu He retrieved the recipe and passed it to the imperial physician to have a look.

Prince Zhou asked, “Who was the one that gave this recipe? Mother’s body is weak and everyone knows it. What are they trying to do by giving a recipe like this?”

Yu He lowered his eyes. “This recipe was given by Official Situ Zhen.”

At this moment, Fu Rou glanced at Yu He. She knew that Situ Zhen had submitted two petitions for Prince Han. Now, Concubine Yan’s side was mentioning Situ Zhen. Everything was too coincidental.

“Situ Zhen?” Alas, the Emperor thought in the direction of conspiracies. “He is submitting petitions for Prince Han and giving tea brewing recipes. There is no official in court that is as busy as him.”

Yu He replied, “Official Situ Zhen enjoys brewing tea and coming up with tea brewing recipes. This licorice root recipe was made

personally by Official Situ Zhen. When he gave this recipe, Her Highness saw and thought that it was not bad, who would have known...”

Fu Rou could not hold herself back, “Your Majesty, regarding Consort Yan’s illness, I have something that I don’t understand and would like to ask the imperial physician. I hope that Your Majesty will allow me to.”

The Emperor gave permission and Fu Rou asked the imperial physician. “With regard to the medical condition of noble ladies in the palace, will the Imperial Physician Office let it be known to others?”

The imperial physician immediately shook his head. “The medical condition of the noble ladies in the palace are highly classified and the Imperial Physician Office would never dare to tell anyone about it.”

Fu Rou continued, “So it means that although everyone knows that Concubine Yan’s health is weak, they don’t know why she is weak. They would not know that she is suffering from phlegm and what she should abstain from taking. An official like Official Situ should definitely have no idea.”

Yu He’s expression did not change. “Court Lady Fu, you are normally attentive only to the knitting and consumption needs of the various noble ladies. How would you know about the mindset of those harbouring unfathomable motives? Those that are good at using tricks may know things that others do not know about.”

“I wouldn’t know if someone is very good at tricks. However, I would like to ask Chief Yu. Did Official Situ personally hand the tea brewing recipe to Concubine Yan?” Fu Rou knew too clearly.

“This...” Yu He hesitated, “The recipe was given to the palace.”

Prince Zhou suddenly spoke, “Since he gave it to the palace, then Official Situ Zhen should know that my mother might use it. Imperial Father, Situ Zhen is really on the same side as Prince Han. He actually has unfathomable motives for giving the recipe. We have to

bring Situ Zhen in to interrogate him.”

“Your Highness, do you know how many tea brewing methods are submitted from outside?” There was disappointment in Fu Rou’s eyes. She never thought that Prince Zhou, who was normally clear, would pretend to be foolish.

Naturally, Prince Zhou could not answer.

Fu Rou answered her own question, “In the past two years, the nobles in the palace have enjoyed brewing tea and there have been many recipes brought in from outside. All recipes that are brought in have to be recorded in the Imperial Food Office. As I manage the Six Offices, the Imperial Food Office is under my jurisdiction. When I was going through their books, I remember that there were 407 tea brewing recipes recorded.”

Prince Zhou narrowed his eyes. “The Six Offices have so many books, Court Lady Fu, your memory is pretty good.”

Fu Rou lowered her eyes. “I have been assigned my responsibilities and do not dare to be negligent. I just think that if Official Situ really had bad intentions towards Concubine Yan, this method depends too highly on luck. How would he know if amongst the 407 recipes, Her Highness would choose his? Her Highness is the one that chooses the recipe, not Official Situ. Moreover, I only remember the total number of recipes. As for the contents of the recipes, peppercorn, pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, orange peel -- I don’t remember them exactly. When I head back, I will look through them carefully and see if Official Situ was the only one that used licorice root. If there are a few more that coincidentally gave their recipes and coincidentally use licorice root as well, would you interrogate all of them, Prince Zhou? If we use this logic and deduction, then should we also interrogate everyone that has submitted a recipe that contains any ingredient that people with phlegm should abstain from. Will this harm His Majesty’s reputation?” *If they had to eradicate any official that did not share the same opinions, then would reason still exist?*

The Emperor was ultimately a wise ruler. “As a court official, Official Situ Zhen should be reprimanded for not focusing on his duty and trying to flatter by giving recipes. But when it comes to saying that

he intentionally wants to hurt Concubine Yan, Prince Zhou, you are too suspicious. You have just begun to learn how to handle official court matters. Distinguishing clearly between right and wrong is the first thing. I know that you care deeply for your mother but you can't just vent your anger like this."

"Imperial Father, you are right. I understand my mistake. I will stay here to take care of my mother. As long as she does not wake up, I will not leave." Prince Zhou glanced at Fu Rou. "I heard that when someone is unconscious, they are still aware of what is going on around them. If someone speaks to her often, perhaps she will wake up faster. Mother has always admired Court Lady Fu and Court Lady Fu's words are pleasant to listen to. I would like for Court Lady Fu to stay behind and serve Mother along with me. Please allow this, Imperial Father."

The Emperor nodded, giving his permission.

These last few chapters are sooo mehhhh. But hang in there!

There will be 2 episodes airing on Thurs, Fri and Sat. The finale is this coming Sunday!

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It was late at night. Fu Rou was beside Concubine Yan's bed. Prince Zhou sat by the side, holding a book in his hands. However, he could not focus a single word, his attention was completely on Fu Rou.

"I heard..."

"Don't mention him." *She already knew what he wanted to say.*

"Him?" He pretended not to understand. "Who is he?"

Fu Rou did not reply as she helped Concubine Yan tuck the blanket properly.

"I heard that someone went against you in the Internal Attendant Department." He watched her expression carefully. "I heard that some general even drew his sword out and pointed it at you. He did not even care about your past relationship."

"It is because he was heartbroken over his elder sister and younger brother. The anger overcame him and he acted rashly." *In the end, they were still going to talk about Sheng Chumu?*

"I was also heartbroken because of my mother, that's why I wanted to interrogate Situ Zhen." He brought up Sheng Chumu just to find a scapegoat for himself.

“People who act quickly often do not consider their actions. Sometimes when we act in the heat of a moment, we have to pay the price. I thought Your Highness knows the palace rules well. It is not like you to act rashly.” *She is forced to be prejudiced. She was afraid power had eroded everyone here.*

“Is that why you did not give me face? It was for my own good?” On the contrary, he could somewhat understand why Sheng Chumu raised his sword at her.

“To him, or anyone else. I have never meant them harm. If every word and action is born from kindness, it will naturally get good results.” She only wanted to do what was right.

“It is easy to say but things don’t often go as one desires. What if you don’t get a good result eighty to ninety percent of the time?” He was not as benevolent as her.

“Die with no regrets. At least you will have a clear conscience.”

Even if she had to go alone and the people around her started to disappear, at least she knew the road in front of her was bright.

Prince Zhou suddenly grabbed onto Fu Rou’s hand and stared deeply into her eyes. “Don’t die. A person like you must live well.”

Fu Rou asked, “A person like me? What kind of person am I?”

“A kind, loyal, upright...fool.” *He can't do it, so all he could do is to slowly let go of her hand.*

Another day passed, Concubine Yan remained unconscious. Because of Yu He’s insinuations, the Emperor specially invited various famous physicians into the palace. As long as they could cure Concubine Yan, they would be rewarded with money and could enter the Imperial Physician Department.

Several famous physicians came. However, they were unable to do anything. There was only one physician left. The imperial physician outside spoke to him first. He thought that since the man was young

and hot-blooded, he might speak frivolously and wanted to chase him away.

However, the Emperor called him in.

When Prince Zhou saw who it was, he was shocked. He never thought that Fu Shui would use this method to openly enter the palace once again.

Fu Shui was self-assured and confident. “Long live Your Majesty. As long as Your Majesty allows me to give Her Highness acupuncture, I will be able to wake Her Highness.”

The imperial physician still objected. “This person wants to use acupuncture on Her Highness’ three points, the Baihui, Yintang and Fengchi points but does not know how deep to go? This kind of incompetent student are only out for the money. Please consider carefully, Your Majesty.”

Fu Shui replied, “I have learned from my father since I was young and have cured several people. I am not incompetent. I don’t know how deep the needle should go in because Her Highness’ illness is uncommon. According to what my father said, when treating uncommon diseases, one has to be able to change according to the situation. You cannot just stick to old ways of acupuncture. You always have to check the patient’s reaction and how the needle feels and make amendments. Your Majesty, please give me a chance. I believe that I will be able to wake Her Highness up with my acupuncture.”

Prince Zhou received several looks from Yu He and understood. This was a plan that his mother, Yu He and Fu Shui had set up a long time ago.

Prince Zhou chuckled bitterly and muttered, “Imperial Father, so many physicians have come to assess Mother’s condition but they were all helpless. Only he dares to speak up. Let him try it.” *He was born as a son but was merely a chess piece. How pathetic.*

Fu Rou could see the instability in Prince Zhou’s expression but did not know the reason why. She took an objective and partial stance.

“Her Highness’ body is precious. It is already out of the ordinary to let outsider physicians treat her. Moreover, this treatment method is special. It is too risky. Perhaps we should properly assess his medical abilities before making a decision?”

Yu He spoke, “Your Majesty, all the invited physicians have been assessed by the Imperial Physician Department. They are all proficient in medicine.”

Prince Zhou knelt and requested, “We cannot afford to delay Mother’s treatment any longer. Please make a decision as soon as possible, Imperial Father.”

The Emperor finally nodded and spoke to Fu Shui, “If anything happens to Concubine Yan, do you know what the consequences are?”

“I will put my life on the line. I will definitely cure Her Highness!” Fu Shui talked big.

However, after the acupuncture, Concubine Yan remained unconscious. The Emperor was furious. “An incompetent physician!”

Fu Shui looked slightly panicked, “Your Majesty, I have absolute faith in my acupuncture. It must be because Her Highness has been unconscious for a while and needs a longer time to wake up.”

However, the Emperor had no patience and immediately called for people to drag Fu Shui out.

Yu He suddenly spoke, “Your Majesty, maybe we should wait a while. Perhaps Her Highness is about to wake up.”

As the Emperor looked at Concubine Yan’s pale face, he was extremely anxious and did not listen to advice.

Seeing how Fu Shui was about to be dragged out, Yu He fell into a kneel in front of the bed. He lifted Concubine Yan’s arm and shook it. He cried out miserably, “Your Highness! Your Highness! Hurry and wake up! Seeing you like this is making my heart ache!”

Fu Rou stepped up to stop him. “Chief Yu, stop! Although you are

loyal, Her Highness is still unwell. How can she withstand such roughness?"

Yu He ignored Fu Rou and continued to shake Concubine Yan. "Your Highness, please open your eyes. His Majesty and Prince Zhou are all waiting for you!"

Concubine Yan suddenly coughed. Yu He looked pleasantly surprised, "Your Highness?"

Prince Zhou fell to a kneel in front of the bed and looked at her emotionally. "Mother?"

The Emperor's eyes also flashed; he was worried that he had misheard. Concubine Yan slowly opened her eyes. "It is so bright, what time is it?"

Yu He turned back and dashed out of the room shouting, "Her Highness is awake! Her Highness is awake!"

Fu Shui, who was being dragged out of the door, turned back and smiled.

Fu Rou looked at Fu Shui and then back at Yu He. A strange feeling came over her.

Concubine Yan was awake and the Emperor was delighted. He thought that Fu Rou had spent a lot of effort taking care of her and allowed her a day of leave. Fu Rou wanted to go back home. Unexpectedly, she bumped into Sheng Chumu outside the palace gates. They were both slightly surprised and the atmosphere was slightly awkward.

Zong Jianxiu saw how Sheng Chumu's eyes were fixed on Fu Rou and lowered his voice, "General, do you want to go over and say hi?"

However, Fu Rou walked past Sheng Chumu. Sheng Chumu's gaze was locked on her.

Zong Jianxiu mumbled to himself, "Your eyes are about to fall out from staring at her. You should just talk to her."

An unexplainable surge of anger rushed over Sheng Chumu and he could not stop himself from calling out loudly, "She is extremely well-liked by the Emperor. Do you think we are worthy of talking to her? Stop overestimating ourselves!"

Fu Rou suddenly walked back. "General Sheng."

Sheng Chumu immediately lifted his arrogant head. "What do you want?"

"Everyone says that General Sheng is good at martial and literary arts. I believe that you are not only good at horse-riding and archery, you must be good in your studies as well, right?"

"I am alright."

"Have you read the Buddhist scriptures before?"

"Yes."

"Then do you believe in karma?"

"In Court Lady Fu's eyes, what is karma?"

"Everything has a start and an end. Having bad intent will result in a bad ending, while having good intentions will lead to a good ending. By acting on kindness, not turning to evil deeds in a rash moment, one will find peace in the end even if the road is difficult." She hoped that he could understand.

"Are things in this world so simple?" He really thought that she was too gullible.

"It is because the things in this world are too complicated. That's why we have to use the most simple method to not forget who we are." She has never forgotten her first and foremost intention. It was to leave this place and be with him. "Doing evil deeds will lead to a bad outcome. Perhaps doing kind deeds will eventually lead to good outcomes. That is why I want to ask you if you believe in karma."

Sheng Chumu's heart wavered. Prince Han was right and he was not stupid either. He knew Fu Rou had stopped him from killing the

Crown Princess to protect him. This was the step that she had given him once again. He was about to step--

“There is no karma, there is only gratitude and grudges.” Prince Zhou interfered once again. He was composed as he walked out of the palace gates. “Sheng Chumu is not a monk, how would he know about karma? A general who has been on the battlefield only believes in gratitude and grudges. I also only believe in that. For example, Court Lady Fu, I have gratitude towards you.”

“How could you possibly be grateful towards me?” Fu Rou’s head hurt.

“When my mother was sick, you accompanied me every night. If not for you, how would I have survived these past few days? Don’t worry, in the future, I will treat you well.” Prince Zhou intentionally spoke affectionately.

Sheng Chumu’s expression turned frigid.

Fu Rou did not want to explain. If just because of a few of Prince Zhou’s words, Sheng Chumu would turn cold towards her, then she did not want to force him. She turned to leave.

However, Prince Zhou did not finish what he wanted to say. “General Sheng, Court Lady reads a lot but she is becoming a little foolish. She told me about karma last night as well. However, in the long night, with a beautiful lady next to me, anything she says is nice to hear.”

Seeing how Sheng Chumu was glaring at him, Prince Zhou was satisfied and turned to leave. *When it came to Fu Rou, he would give up if Sheng Chumu was adamant and did not let go of her. However, if Sheng Chumu lets go of Fu Rou, he would hold onto her even more tightly. He was going to let Sheng Chumu make the decision first. This was already gentlemanly enough of him.*

Zong Jianxiu was careful, “General...” He was thinking of how to phrase his words.

Ye Qiulang ran over from the other side. “General, that brat is running towards us.”

Sheng Chumu regulated his breathing and calmed himself down. He grabbed onto the hilt of his sword and reminded himself not to forget what they were here for.

Prince Zhou... -_-

And uh oh. Fu Shui is back!

Court Lady

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Fu Shui walked out of the gate, looking slightly tipsy. Concubine Yan had awoken and the Emperor had bestowed the title of Imperial Physician on him. From now on, he could enter the palace freely. All the other Imperial Physicians then tried to take advantage of the situation and specially invited him to banquets to celebrate. All of a sudden, a shadow flashed in front of him. He was surrounded.

Sheng Chumu pointed his sword at him. “Everyone said that there was a miracle physician in the royal palace called Fu Shui. I thought I had misheard. I could not find you anywhere but you actually delivered yourself in front of me. Men, tie him up!”

Fu Shui did not struggle as the corners of his mouth turned up in a smile. “This is a misunderstanding.”

Sheng Chumu was cold. “Whether it is a mistake or not shall be decided by His Majesty.”

Sheng Chumu delivered Fu Shui to the Emperor and presented the investigation he had done on the Crown Prince. He found out that Fu Shui was a fugitive and mentioned that when Sheng Chujun infiltrated the Eastern Palace, he had witnessed Fu Shui instigating the Crown Prince numerous times. Fu Shui admitted that he had come from the Eastern Palace but said that he was only there to treat the Crown Prince's leg and had nothing to do with the rebellion.

As both sides were singing different tunes, the Emperor had to ask for evidence.

Sheng Chumu had already prepared and summoned Grand Prince Liang and Du He. Grand Prince Liang and Du He admitted that Fu Shui was the mastermind behind the plot. They also said that he was the one that came up with the idea of killing Prince Han.

The Emperor was starting to believe them when Yan Zifang asked for an audience.

As soon as Grand Prince Liang saw Yan Zifang, he momentarily lost his cool. “Yan Zifang, you despicable man. Where did you hide my consort?”

After Grand Prince Liang saw that the Crown Prince’s plan had failed, he escaped out of the palace and returned to his residence, wanting to run away with Yingying. Unexpectedly, he was informed that Yingying had left with Yan Zifang. He then wanted to escape but his eagle king flew to the sky gave a warning call and exposed his location. He then understood the real reason why Yan Zifang had given him the eagle king.

Yan Zifang’s expression did not change. “Grand Prince Liang, when did you see me hiding your consort? I don’t know where the consort is but I heard that you abused your consort frequently. Your consort has already harboured hatred towards you. In the past, she had to put up with your abuse and could only pretend to comply and make you happy. Now that she has the chance to escape your devil claws, I can only imagine how far she has run.”

Grand Prince Liang was in disbelief. “That cannot be. She treated me genuinely! She is different from the other women who try to suck up to me. She will not leave me behind!”

Yan Zifang chuckled coldly, “The truth is right in front of you, there is no use deceiving yourself and others.” *This morning, he went to the small hut and found out that Lu Yingying was missing. He had always thought that Lu Yingying still had feelings for him, but he was the one that was deceiving himself.*

Grand Prince Liang glared at Yan Zifang and suddenly realised, “It is you! You are the man that she refused to talk about! You adulterer. I will kill you!”

Two guards held Grand Prince Liang back.

“Yan Zifang, no wonder you always created trouble for me. Since the beginning, you have meant me harm. You were the one that caused me to end up like this! You will die a horrible death!”

The Emperor thought that Grand Prince Liang’s lecherous side had started again. “That’s enough! You are the one that brought yourself to this state! Today, I am asking about the Crown Prince’s case. Not about the embarrassing things from your Liang Residence!”

“I cannot accept this! I cannot!” Grand Prince Liang shouted. They both helped the Crown Prince rebel but Yan Zifang had simply turned into an official with contributions.

The Emperor ordered for him to be slapped.

Grand Prince Liang was being slapped and thought he might as well die. “Hit me! Hit me till I die! Great Tang’s Emperor is benevolent! Back then, during the Xuanwu Gate Coup, he killed Elder Brother, Jiancheng, and Fourth Brother, Yuanji. Now that Grand Emperor is no longer around, he can no longer stand his brothers! I finally understand. Even if the incident with the Crown Prince did not happen, you would not tolerate me! Today, you cannot tolerate your brother, tomorrow you will no longer be able to tolerate your children and grandchildren. One day, you will see your children and grandchildren die before you...!”

The Emperor was so angry that he could not say anything.

Chief Cao could read his expression and quickly instructed guards to drag Grand Prince Liang out.

The Emperor took the tea that Chief Cao handed over to him. After drinking a cup, his expression relaxed. “Yan Zifang, you still haven’t explained why you have come.”

“I rushed here to request for Your Majesty to reward a minister that

has contributed greatly.” Yan Zifang kneeled and pointed at Fu Shui. “With regard to the Crown Prince incident, Fu Shui is the true contributor.”

Sheng Chumu raised his eyebrows.

Yan Zifang continued, “On the day that the Crown Prince started to have thoughts of rebelling, his actions were suspicious. I pretended to pledge my loyalty to the Crown Prince and complied with him. Finally, I managed to obtain the information the night before and quickly reported to Your Majesty. It goes without saying how dangerous it is to infiltrate the Eastern Palace to obtain information. Like what happened to Sheng Chujun, a small mistake would result in a brutal death. The only reason why I could safely send a message to Your Majesty is because of Fu Shui’s help. Because he was there to treat the Crown Prince’s leg, he gained the Crown Prince’s trust and helped me cover up many times, allowing me to escape death.”

Du He was agitated. “Nonsense! Your Majesty, I can swear to heaven that Fu Shui was the one that came up with the idea of harming others. He is the true mastermind!”

Yan Zifang’s expression did not change. “If I made contributions by sending the letter, half of it should belong to Fu Shui. Your Majesty, Fu Shui should not be punished. He should be rewarded.”

“Yan Zifang, I was blind to not have seen through you as the bastard that was helping others...” Du He realised that the Emperor was looking coldly at him and changed his tone. “It is okay if you are helping others and telling His Majesty about the secret. I have no opinions if you are loyal to His Majesty, but Fu Shui was obviously the one that sabotaged the Eastern Palace and us. Why are you speaking up for him?”

Yan Zifang spoke completely unrighteously, “Consort, you are dragging an innocent person down with you. If he was the mastermind of the plot, will it reduce your punishment? Will you be able to escape being punished?”

Sheng Chumu spoke, “Even if he wanted to drag someone down, Consort Du He would choose a high-ranking minister to frame. Fu

Shui is just a small and quiet physician in the Eastern Palace. If Fu Shui did not instigate the Crown Prince and take part in the plot, how would the Consort even have thought of him? Even if the Consort's words cannot be trusted, my younger brother lost his life in the Eastern Palace. Could his last words also not be trusted?"

Yan Zifang chuckled coldly, "Other than you, no one else knows what Sheng Chujun said before he died. You can say whatever you want."

Sheng Chumu's frown deepened. "Yan Zifang, I know very well what Chujun told me. Just to protect Fu Shui, you are targeting me instead..." Initially, he had thought that Yan Zifang was looking to gain contributions and chose to take the risk to get close to the Crown Prince. He had not thought otherwise. But now, it was obvious that Yan Zifang and Fu Shui were from the same side.

Yan Zifang's expression changed slightly.

Sheng Chumu pleaded with the Emperor, "Your Majesty, Yan Zifang's words are suspicious. Please hand him over to me, I will find out the truth."

The Emperor thought about it. "Sheng Chujun was killed by the Eastern Palace. It is obvious that he was not colluding with the Eastern Palace. Just now, you hinted that Sheng Chumu is lying and that he is using Sheng Chujun's last words to frame Fu Shui? But what resentment does Sheng Chumu have with a physician that he would need to frame Fu Shui? Your intentions are suspicious."

"Your Majesty, I formed a relationship with Fu Shui as we both escaped from the Eastern Palace. I was extremely frustrated to see Fu Shui being framed and in my agitation, I spoke out at Sheng Chumu. Actually, Duke Lu is extremely loyal and Sheng Chujun lost his life trying to expose the Crown Prince's ploy. I respect them deeply. But these things are different, even if Sheng Chujun says that Fu Shui is guilty, we can't punish Fu Shui just because of what he said."

After mingling in the palace for so long, lying was as easy as eating a meal. Yan Zifang had adapted accordingly. "Sheng Chujun pretended to be loyal to the Crown Prince and no one knew that he was sending information back to Sheng Chumu. Aren't I and Fu Shui the same?

We are loyal to the country and loyal to Your Majesty. But only we know it. We did not know about Sheng Chujun's loyalty and thought that Sheng Chujun was a traitor helping the Crown Prince set up the conspiracy. Sheng Chujun did not know that Fu Shui and I had agreed to find out information and inform Your Majesty, so of course he would look at Fu Shui as a traitor. Maybe in Sheng Chujun's eyes, not only is Fu Shui guilty, I am guilty as well."

Sheng Chumu was not affected. "Your Majesty, Yan Zifang's words do not match and are extremely dubious..."

Fu Shui suddenly cut him off. "Your Majesty! I am just a physician and it was fate that I entered the Eastern Palace. I know that my status is low and I am bound to die if I am involved in something like this. However, at that time, I could not pull myself out. I had no choice but to discuss with General Yan on how to inform Your Majesty. Even if someone found out and killed me, I would have served the country with my life. Now that General Yan's secret letter was effective, the Eastern Palace's ploy has been exposed and Your Majesty has returned safely, everything is worth it. As for me, General Sheng is correct. Because of circumstances, I did participate in the Eastern Palace's plot. In order not to be silenced, I had to force myself to give the Crown Prince's ideas. These are all my crimes. Please punish me, Your Majesty, I will have no regrets giving up my life!"

Yan Zifang added, "If Your Majesty is going to execute Fu Shui, please execute me as well. In order to obtain accurate information, I have also participated in the Eastern Palace's plot and given the Crown Prince ideas as well. Fu Shui's crime is mine as well!"

Du He shouted, "Your Majesty, don't be fooled by them! Fu Shui was more proactive than anyone when it came to giving the Crown Prince ideas. He was the one that instigated the Crown Prince to make a move on Prince Han! He was also the one that urged the Crown Prince to take hold of Chang'an and while Your Majesty was unprepared. He wanted to make you a mere figurehead and force you to become the Grand Emperor!"

Sheng Chumu spoke, "Your Majesty..."

“That’s enough!” The Emperor waved dismissively. “There is someone that knows everything that happened better than you!”

Whether Fu Shui was the mastermind or conspirator, he would know just by asking the Crown Prince.

Why is Yan Zifang on Fu Shui's side?

Court Lady

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The Crown Prince was summoned. He looked haggard as he limped into the hall. He no longer had any of the high-spirit that he had before. His eyes were expressionless as he brushed over the people in the palace. He only paused when he caught sight of Fu Shui.

The Emperor's eyes were filled with disappointment. "Crown Prince, Grand Prince Liang and Consort Du both testified against Fu Shui and said that your rebellious actions were largely instigated by him. Is this true?"

"Crown Prince, if it were not for Fu Shui bewitching you, would you have ended up like this? Everything started because of him. In the end, he bewitched you on one hand but secretly colluded with Yan Zifang to write a secret message to sell you out on the other hand!" Du He shouted.

The Crown Prince turned to look at Fu Shui sharply, he was shocked. "Secret message?"

Fu Shui spoke coldly, "Yes, I knew long ago about Yan Zifang sending a secret letter to the Hot Spring Palace. It was that night when you were playing chess with me in the study room."

The Crown Prince was momentarily stunned as his mind went blank. Chief Cao urged him, "Crown Prince, His Majesty is waiting for your reply."

The Crown Prince trembled before refocusing. “Imperial Father, they are speaking the truth. If not for Fu Shui, I would not have walked down this path. Everything was instigated by Fu Shui! Imperial Father, please kill Fu Shui and take revenge for me!”

The Emperor could sense his fury and only half believed him. “What did he instigate you to do? Tell me.”

“He instigated me to kill Prince Han, to steal the throne and...and...oh right! He was the one that influenced me to abandon my duties and pamper the actor! If not for him, I would not have fallen out with you! Everything is his fault! He deserves to die!”

The Crown Prince kowtowed. “Imperial Father, please forgive me.”

Yan Zifang immediately spoke, “Your Majesty, His Highness resents Fu Shui for betraying him, that is why he said that. It was clear from his words. He wants Your Majesty to execute Fu Shui to help him take revenge.”

Chief Cao spoke quietly to the Emperor, “Your Majesty, Fu Shui only entered the Eastern Palace after the Crown Prince fell down the horse and injured his leg. However, at that time, the actor that the Crown Prince favoured, Chen Ji, was already dead. No matter how much Fu Shui tries to instigate him, he wouldn’t have been able to on this matter.”

The Emperor was well aware and directed his fury towards the Crown Prince, “How dare you lie to me and use this botched way of using me to kill someone else? Do you think I will fall for it? You are evil yet you are not repentant and are trying to frame someone good. It seems like I have been too kind towards you.”

The Emperor then instructed for the Crown Prince to be locked up in the internal attendants prison. He was to sleep on dried hay like the attendants that had committed crimes and eat the same food as them.

The Crown Prince was being dragged out as he turned back to shout, “Imperial Father, it is all Fu Shui’s fault! Imperial Father, you have to split Fu Shui up into a thousand pieces! He was the one that caused

me to become like this. If he did not expose me, I would have become the Emperor!” He suddenly burst out in hysterical laughter, “Hahaha! He was the one that caused me to lose everything! He is the traitor! The traitor should die!”

His Imperial Father did not understand him but he understood his Imperial Father very well. His Imperial Father was generous towards others but strict towards him and could not stand a single grain of sand. The more he wanted to clear his name, the more his Imperial Father would push him to the edge. Too many have already died for him. He promised before that he would protect Fu Shui. He would not let Fu Shui end up like Chen Ji.

Fu Shui silently looked at the Crown Prince’s hobbling figure. His cold eyes flickered with a slight emotion.

Fu Rou, Lu Yingying and Fu Yin stared at each other in dismay.

In the beginning, Lu Yingying had secretly followed Fu Rou and Fu Rou had caught her. Lu Yingying wanted to find out about Grand Prince Liang and was intending to surrender herself to the authorities. Although Fu Rou admired Lu Yingying for her kindness, she did not think surrendering was the best way. Grand Prince Liang had helped the Crown Prince to rebel and the crime was on him. It had nothing to do with Lu Yingying. It was extremely lucky that Lu Yingying could escape unharmed. It was proof that good people would have a good ending. It didn’t seem worth it if she were to die with her husband and give up her life for no reason. Hence, Lu Yingying was persuaded by Fu Rou and agreed to stay at the Fu Residence temporarily. They were going to assess the situation first.

As fate would have it, Fu Yin returned home too. Fu Tao also managed to snatch Shan’er from the housekeeper’s hands. He told the rest of the family that it was an abandoned baby and brought him home to raise.

Fu Rou did not manage to ask Fu Yin anything before Lu Yingying and Fu Yin saw each other. They were both shocked. Fu Rou sensed that something was wrong and made an excuse to bring Lu Yingying and Fu Yin into a side room.

Seeing how the both of them were not speaking, she took the initiative. "Between the both of you, one of you has to speak first."

Lu Yingying broke the silence, "Both your parents are dead? Your aunt sold you to a trafficker?"

Fu Yin chuckled bitterly, "They are lies."

Lu Yingying asked, "Why?"

Fu Yin replied, "Lu Qi ordered Lu Hanxing to set fire to the Fu Residence just because my Second Sister witnessed your family transporting ill-gotten wealth. In the end, my mother was burned to death in that fire."

Fu Rou was shocked. "How did you know?"

Fu Yin's expression did not change. "Lu Hanxing said it himself."

Lu Yingying finally understood. "So that's why you killed Lu Hanxing. Not because he took liberties with you, but for revenge. You became my brother's concubine and gave birth to Shan'er, all for revenge."

In that few short sentences, Fu Rou's astonishment grew a few folds. She also felt her heart ache. She never thought that the reason Fu Yin left would be to take revenge and she would never have imagined that Fu Yin would give away her body to Lu Qi for that.

Lu Yingying asked, "You caused a man who loves you deeply to be heartbroken and now he lives a life no better than death. How does it feel to have taken revenge? Does it feel as good as you had imagined it to be?"

Fu Yin did not answer her question. "If you want to take revenge for Lu Qi, you can do it now."

Lu Yingying shook her head. "You are not the only one I know that had ruined yourself just to take revenge on others. You think you are able to distinguish between gratitude and resentment but you're actually the most foolish person on earth. By doing anything to take revenge, how would there be any place for kindness and justice? If

the hatred continues from generation to generation, what will Shan'er's future be like?"

She understood the pain of losing a mother but was revenge the only way to obtain peace? There were clearly other ways like living a happy life.

Shan'er suddenly started crying.

Lu Yingying sighed, "When Shan'er grows up, should he kill his own father to take revenge for his grandmother? Or should he kill you to take revenge for his father? Maybe he should kill himself. After all, he stemmed from the seed of hatred!"

Fu Yin hugged Shan'er tightly, pressing her face on his cheek. She regretted it, but it was too late for regrets.

Sigh. I can't believe the Crown Prince would still protect Fu Shui after knowing that he had betrayed him. This guy is so stupid.

And aaaaaiiii.

Court Lady

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Fu Shui knelt in greeting to Concubine Yan. “Greetings, Aunt.”

Concubine Yan was heartened. “Good child, you are finally here.”

Concubine Yan and Yu He were siblings with the same father but different mothers. When the Sui Dynasty was wiped out, Yu He had been living outside the palace with his mother, who had a low status. That was how he survived. Thereafter, Yu He had concealed his identity and left the newly-born Fu Shui to enter the palace to protect Concubine Yan. Today, the two of them had worked together to bring the Crown Prince down.

Yu He advised, “Your Highness, you have just recovered, you cannot be too emotional.”

Concubine Yan looked at Yu He. “We are all a family here, why are you still calling me Your Highness?”

Yu He froze. His voice trembled slightly as he called out, “Sister!”

Concubine Yan’s eyes teared momentarily as she grabbed Yu He’s hand. “Younger Brother! All these years, the both of us have been walking on thin ice in the palace. Although we see each other daily, we never dared to call each other as brother and sister!”

Fu Shui sighed, “The great Sui Royal Family has been bearing

humiliation to this point.”

Yu He spoke, “The Crown Prince and Prince Han have both been taken down. Prince Zhou’s position is becoming more stable. Soon, we won’t have to tolerate anyone.”

“We put up with the humiliation for our future.” Concubine Yan had tolerated all these years. “As long as there is hope, what is it to tolerate a little for what’s in front of us? My child, you have suffered all these years. You even gave up your surname. Now with everything in play, you were actually given the surname Yang by the Emperor. This is a lucky omen from heaven. Our great Sui family will rise once again.”

Yu He used his sleeves to dab the corners of his eyes. “Fu Shui, quickly take your aunt’s pulse.”

Fu Shui finished taking her pulse. “There is nothing serious. Take medicine according to my prescription for the next three months to replenish your vital energy and all will be good.”

“Don’t talk big.” Yu He was extremely strict with his son. “I am afraid your medical skills are not good enough yet. Didn’t you say that after your aunt drinks the medicine to make her unconscious, she would wake up immediately with three needles? Why did it take so long for her to wake on that day? If your aunt’s eyes opened any later, your head would have rolled. If I knew that your plan was not foolproof, I would not have allowed your aunt to take such a risk.”

Concubine Yan smiled slightly, “Don’t scold him. It was a little risky but didn’t we pull through in the end?”

“It was my fault. I prepared the medicine but did not accurately determine how weak your body is. Father is right, this was too risky. If we had miscalculated, we would have lost everything.” Fu Shui smartly changed the topic. “Aunt, does Prince Zhou often leave the palace to clear his mind nowadays?”

Concubine Yan felt helpless. “He is a filial child. If we told him about me taking this risk beforehand, he would definitely object. Hence, we hid it from him. Now that he saw you enter the palace to wake me

up, he should be able to guess what happened. He must be very angry.”

Yu He sighed, “We can’t blame him for being angry. In the few days that you were unconscious, he could neither eat nor sleep. He was always by your side. Now that he suddenly found out that all these were part of our plan, naturally...”

Concubine Yan cut him off, “Fu Shui, you are almost the same age as Ge’er. Please talk to him when you have time. In the future, when he ascends the throne, he will have to rely on you to protect him.”

Fu Shui lowered his head. “Understood.”

Li Baolin was wandering in the Imperial garden when she unexpectedly came across a matter.

Concubine Yan’s palace maid had collided with Concubine Zhen’s palace maid. Their collision caused an accessory that the Emperor had given to Concubine Yan to break. Concubine Yan’s palace maid struck out to teach the other palace maid a lesson and alerted Concubine Zhen, who had been admiring flowers nearby. Recently, Concubine Zhen had been confirmed to be pregnant. Unfortunately, this happened at the same time when Concubine Yan was unconscious. The Emperor’s mind had been on Concubine Yan and Concubine Zhen had been angry because of it. Today, as she saw that even Concubine Yan’s palace maid was so arrogant, she could not drop the matter and immediately punished her to be slapped.

Seeing things turn serious, Li Baolin had to step up for Concubine Yan’s palace maid.

Concubine Zhen was very unhappy. “Li Baolin, recently there has been no shortage of people who have been trying to suck up to Concubine Yan. Even if you fawn on her, you won’t be able to gain much. Why do you need to stand up for this palace maid?”

Li Baolin smiled. “Sister, you are thinking too much. Who am I to stand up for Concubine Yan?” She picked up the accessory from the

floor and scolded Concubine Yan's palace maid. "A gift from the Emperor fell on the floor. Instead of hurrying to pick it up and seeing if it is spoilt, you focused on quarreling. Concubine Zhen taught you all for your own good. Aren't you both going to thank Concubine Zhen?"

Both palace maids focused on the situation and thanked Concubine Zhen.

Concubine Zhen wanted to say more.

Li Baolin grabbed her wrist. "Just now, I was heading to your place to visit you. I never thought that you would be here strolling in the Imperial Garden. While I was on my way here, I saw several internal attendants carrying gifts over. They said that they were gifts for you from the Emperor. Sister, you are now pregnant with the Emperor's child. Although the Emperor is busy with official duties and cannot visit you often, he must still be thinking of you. Punishing these maids is a small matter, but if you get too angry and affect the baby, it will be a huge issue."

Concubine Zhen's expression softened by a lot and followed Li Baolin out.

Concubine Zhen spoke, "It is not that I like to get angry but when the Empress was around, Concubine Yan was restrained. Now that the position of Empress is empty and the Emperor is bewitched by her, she is becoming more arrogant. If I don't try to bring her down a notch now, I am afraid that I won't have any place in the future."

Li Baolin replied, "Sister, you are different from us. You have served the Emperor for many years. Even if you have no achievements, your efforts are noted. Now that you are carrying royal blood, after you give birth to your child, wouldn't the Emperor dote on you even more?"

"You are still young and have such an innocent mind. So what if I have served the Emperor for many years? So what if I gave birth to his child? As soon as something happens, everything becomes insignificant." Concubine Zhen pointed to a far corner of the roof. "That is living proof. Want to take a look?"

Li Baolin could not curb her curiosity and followed Concubine Zhen to the Cold Palace. She looked through the carved stone window and saw a woman with grey hair spread across her shoulders. She looked haggard and was knocking a wooden fish outside her broken house.

“Isn’t that Concubine Xi? Even if she had been demoted, she is still a Lady. There is no need for her to end up in a place like this.”

Concubine Zhen shook her head and sighed, “When the Empress was around, she still took care of her. Now that Concubine Yan is making the decisions, she kept on saying that the place Lady Xi was staying in was dirty and changed her accommodation every three to five days. Each time she is shifted, her room becomes worse. Now, she is in the Cold Palace. She is very pitiful. Initially, the Emperor could not bear it and promised not to kill Prince Zhao. He even let both of them meet. Who would have thought that Prince Zhao would write that letter to rebel? The letter was picked up by guards and delivered to His Majesty. His Majesty was furious and executed Prince Zhao. Lady Xi was also implicated.”

Li Baolin suddenly recalled on the night of the incident, she happened to be near a man made mountain and witnessed an internal attendant throwing a letter to the ground. The internal attendant then intentionally alerted some guards. At that time, she did not know what was going on and was not concerned about Prince Zhao’s rebellion case. Now that she was listening to Concubine Zhen, she felt that there was a connection.

Concubine Zhen saw that Li Baolin was in a daze. “Why? Did talking about this scare you?”

Li Baolin replied, “It is not that I am scared, I am just deep in thought. The Emperor was thinking of forgiving Prince Zhao yet Prince Zhao coincidentally chooses to write a secret letter to rebel. This letter was also coincidentally dropped and was coincidentally picked up by guards. Isn’t everything too coincidental?” She had clearly seen the internal attendant intentionally alerting the guards.

Concubine Zhen was not surprised. “Prince Zhao is already dead, what more is there to think about? However--” She looked like she had an idea. “I want His Majesty to see how his kind and gentle

Concubine Yan treats her fellow sister after so many years.”

Li Baolin opened her mouth but ended up deciding to protect herself first.

After a few days, Imperial Concubine Wang told the Emperor that Lady Xi was in the Cold Palace. She was being served soured food and was not treated fairly. After the Emperor investigated, he reprimanded the two internal attendants that Concubine Yan had assigned to take care of Lady Xi.

After the punishment, the attendant that the Emperor sent spoke loudly, “His Majesty has been kind and the punishment was only a hundred strokes. In the future, if anyone dares to use Concubine Yan’s name to make things difficult for the other noble ladies, they will be beaten to death. Understood?”

All the palace personnel acknowledged.

It was only then that the attendant walked into the hall and smiled at Concubine Yan, “Your Highness, these two servants were outrageous and ruined Your Highness’ reputation. Hence, His Majesty punished them on your behalf. This is His Majesty’s love towards you. Your Highness, please don’t take this incident to heart.”

Concubine Yan spoke gently, “What are you talking about? His Majesty is protecting me and helped me deal with these two despicable servants. I am delighted. I have already reprimanded them a few times. However, they took advantage of my good temper to become even harsher. Lady Xi has been my sister for many years. How can they mistreat her like this? His Majesty is kind. I do not dare to let them serve me anymore. From now on, these two shall be treated as criminals. They can no longer appear in front of me.”

By the side, a palace maid bribed the internal attendant.

The internal attendant took his leave. “Your Highness, please rest assured. I know what to tell His Majesty.”

Concubine Yan asked everyone else to leave except for Yu He.

“Who told the Emperor?” Her face fell.

“Concubine Zhen told Imperial Concubine Wang and Imperial Concubine Wang then told the Emperor.” Yu He had investigated.

“Yu He, I have always been tolerant. Because the Empress was the official wife, all fault would lie on me if I were to be arrogant. Tell me, now that the Empress is gone and the Crown Prince has been defeated, who else do I have to tolerate?”

She was not going to tolerate an old lady with one foot in the grave and a concubine with an unborn child!

Who would've thought that Yu He would be Concubine Yan's brother? O_O

Court Lady

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On this day, Ma Haihu and Ma Hainiu had an internal strife in a pawn shop that Prince Han owned.

Now that Prince Han was facing difficulties, the release of his house arrest was nowhere in the near future. People with other intentions started to take the chance and come to the pawn shop. They started to claim that the worthless jade pieces that they had pawned previously were some house treasure. They made up stories and demanded for the shopkeeper to return the items. Because the jade pieces had passed its redemption period, they had been sold. The shopkeeper could not deal with this difficult customer and promised to repay him three times the amount. Unknowingly, the customer demanded that the item was worth three thousand tael and demanded it to be paid in cash immediately.

The shopkeeper was stunned as he did not have so much cash. Ma Haihu suddenly came out and said that he was willing to pay the tael but requested for the shop to swap locations with them. He wanted this shop, which was situated in a flourishing area, to move to a corner with little traffic.

Seeing how things were not going well, Ma Hainiu cut in and generously offered the three thousand tael, putting an end to this premeditated plot.

Ma Haihu pulled Ma Hainiu to the side and angrily asked her what she was doing.

Ma Hainiu retorted, “More like what are you doing! Are you trying to profit from someone’s misfortune and attack them while they are down?”

Ma Haihu was angry. “Taking advantage of people and attacking them when they are down are what we pirates do.”

Ma Hainiu spat, “Peh! Are you still a pirate? You are a court official.”

Ma Haihu straightened his back. “It is because I am a court official that I have to attack them when they are down. Now that we have such glory from following Prince Zhou, we have to pledge our loyalty to Prince Zhou. The best way to pledge our loyalty is to brutally attack Prince Han, this fallen dog.”

Ma Hainiu wanted to laugh. “With your brain, I am sure you were not the one who thought of this.”

Ma Haihu admitted, “It was our General’s idea, but I thought about it properly.”

“Then did you think of the favours that Consort Han did for me?” The people from General Zhenhai’s Residence had no personal grudges with Han Mansion. *Back when they were still pirates, they still acted with conscience when they stole and robbed. How come they can’t differentiate between good and bad now?”*

“She is already dead and won’t be able to see you repay her anyway.” *Anyway, what is gratitude? He has never seen any good come out of it.*

Ma Hainiu was furious. “Then in the future, when you die, do I still need to offer incense and burn paper money for you? You won’t be able to see it after you’re dead anyway! Ma Haihu, even if you are a pirate, you should have a bottom line and principles. Be a pirate with morals! Do you know what people say about pirates with true abilities? Entering first is bravery, leaving last is loyalty. Pirates have to be loyal! Look at yourself, how have you improved since we came to Chang’an? You did not learn anything else except how to be

shameless, petty and despicable!”

Ma Haihu shouted, “That’s enough! You studied for a few days and now you are lecturing your older brother! Do you think you are so great just because you opened a shop and earned some money?”

Ma Hainiu shook her head. “General Ma is so impressive. Lian Yan’er had good eyes to see through a person like you. When you didn’t have power or status, everything was good. Once you obtained power, you change sides and no longer care about your past relationships. No wonder she left you so early!”

Ma Haihu punched Ma Hainiu in the face.

Ma Hainiu was shocked as tears appeared in her eyes. *Both her face and heart hurt. She really did not like her leader and brother now. Her leader had asked her to reveal how the Crown Princess had relied on Consort Han to become the Crown Princess and not long later, the Crown Princess killed Consort Han. She had always felt as if she had aided Consort Han’s death. There were many things she could not understand but she had a bad feeling. Today, as she saw her brother look no different from a tyrant, she felt extremely horrible.*

Ma Haihu was stunned to see his sister running away in tears. They had relied on each other and he was like her father. He doted on her and never thought that he would hit her. He became anxious and was about to chase her when someone called him.

“General Ma.”

Ma Haihu turned back and his gaze froze. It was Lian Yan’er, who had gone missing for quite some time.

Lian Yan’er smiled at him. “Congratulations on getting promoted.”

Ma Haihu pretended to be cool. “Did you come and find me after knowing that I got promoted?”

Lian Yan’er was very natural. “Of course.”

Ma Haihu’s breath hitched and he blurted out, “Vain!”

Lian Yan'er smiled. "You already knew I was born as a prostitute with no one to rely on. I can only be vain."

"I thought that you were different." *That's why he had fallen for her.*

Lian Yan'er's eyes sparkled. "How different?"

Ma Haihu huffed, "I know that I am stupid. You are actually the same as all the other women!"

"All brothel girls are vain. But what about men? Aren't they the same? When they don't have money, they are loyal. When they have money, they are no longer loyal. Even if the person suffered with them in the past, they will just abandon them once they are old. They will let you be a puppet as an official wife but they will go and take in other concubines. They consider that 'having cherished their past'. Women who give their true heart will always be let down by men in the end."

"I won't let you down." Ma Haihu's anger unknowingly dissipated.

"Liar." Lian Yan'er looked aggrieved. "In the past, you treated me so well. Now that you have been promoted, you are showing me attitude and loudly chiding me."

"I..." Ma Haihu immediately lowered his voice, "You left without saying anything. How can I not be anxious?"

"Ma Haihu, if I truly give you my heart, would you be true to me as well?" Lian Yan'er's eyes were filled with a deeper meaning.

Ma Haihu was dumb and could not tell. He nodded honestly.

"Forever?"

"Forever."

"If you become a big official in the future or even a duke, everyone will fawn over you and send you a lot of young and beautiful ladies. At that time, I will be old and ugly, would you still accompany me?" *She had high expectations.*

Ma Haihu promised, "Yes."

"Your promise to me today is like a dream. A lot of my sisters once dreamt of this. They dream to have a husband that will pledge his undying love to them and love them till the end of time. With their beauty, they were fawned over by many and never had to worry about food and clothes. They willingly gave up everything they had accumulated and their past glory. They were willing to suffer with the man. In the end, when the man finally made something out of himself, what they got was disdain and abandonment. They turned old and became ugly. Without a house, they are left out on the streets like a beggar. Because they were once brothel girls, no one pitied them and said they deserved it. This world will never willingly give us a way out. I am afraid. I am afraid that I would go through this nightmare as well."

Ma Haihu held onto both of Lian Yan'er's hands. "With me around, your dream will come true. Although I am a pirate, I mean whatever I say. Like what people in the past say, a pirate also has morals."

Lian Yan'er smiled bashfully. "In the past, I always thought that you were foolish..."

Ma Haihu objected, "Eh, you are not being sincere. I am telling you what I truly feel..."

"I never thought that you were actually so capable. Every word that you say moved me. Therefore, I want to marry you." Lian Yan'er blushed slightly as a hint of self doubt appeared on her face.

Ma Haihu was in disbelief. "Really?"

"Bring engagement gifts tomorrow and I will belong to you." *She wanted to spend the rest of her life with him.*

"Why must we wait until tomorrow? Can't we do it today?" Ma Haihu retrieved a bag of money clumsily. "Will this do?"

"Stupid, of course not." Lian Yan'er wanted to laugh. "Only something that can represent your true feelings is considered an engagement gift. You can't buy it, you have to make it yourself. It

can be a wooden statue, a comb or even a small pinwheel; as long as you make it yourself.”

“Okay!” *That wasn’t difficult!*

“I’ll meet you tomorrow afternoon at the lake outside the city. I won’t leave if I don’t see you.”

“Got it. I will go and make it now!” Ma Haihu looked back as he ran. He waved at Lian Yan’er.

Lian Yan’er waved back with a hopeful look in her eyes. When Ma Haihu was finally out of sight, she turned around and faced the other end of the alley.

“Come out, I saw you a long time ago.”

Yan Zifang came out from behind the corner. He was expressionless.

“Since you already heard us, I will be straightforward.” Lian Yan’er’s smile disappeared. “I don’t want to stay in Duke Lu’s Residence anymore.”

“But Ma Haihu has not become a duke yet.” *Yan Zifang thought that her goal would have been much bigger.*

Lian Yan’er shook her head. “With how stupid he is, he will be killed if he becomes a duke. Getting to his current position is already good enough.”

“Good, Ma Haihu should have better days.” Yan Zifang was happy for his brother but did not show it. “But before that, there is someone who wants to meet you.”

Lian Yan’er asked, “Who?”

Yan Zifang did not answer but instead asked, “Do you want to see the ocean? In the future, Ma Haihu will be transferred to protect a coastal region. If you go with him, you will see the spectacular sunrise and sunset over the ocean everyday. What do you think?”

Lian Yan’er smiled, “No matter where he goes, I will follow him.”

Yan Zifang was slightly jealous of Ma Haihu. *Ma Haihu was much more fortunate than him. A foolish person has foolish fortune.*

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Grand Prince Liang was sitting dejectedly in prison. He heard that Du He was going to be beheaded and knew that his punishment was about to come. All of a sudden, a slender body appeared on the outside of the bars. In his distracted state, he thought that it was Lu Yingying and hurried to lift his head. However, he was disappointed.

“Your Highness, your consort was the one who asked me to come.”
Fu Rou was the one that came.

Grand Prince Liang’s eyes shot open. He got up to stand in front of Fu Rou. “Lu Yingying was the one that asked you to come?”

Fu Rou retrieved a jade bracelet. “I have evidence.”

Grand Prince Liang took it and saw that it was the bracelet his mother gave to Lu Yingying. A complicated look appeared on his face.

Fu Rou said, “Your consort is very worried about you.”

“She is worried about me?” Grand Prince Liang lifted his face as he glared fiercely. “Is she wondering if I am dead yet? If I am dead, she can live happily with that bastard of hers! Dream on! Tell that bitch that even if I become a ghost, I will bother her everyday and make her life no better than death!”

With all his might, he threw the jade bracelet on the ground and shattered the bracelet.

Fu Rou glanced coldly at him. "Your Highness, what right do you have to hate your consort?"

Grand Prince Liang called out, "She betrayed me and hurt me. Is it wrong for me to hate her?"

"May I know how many people you have betrayed and hurt in your life?" Fu Rou was straightforward and strict. "I bet even Your Highness won't be able to count the exact number. Those girls who gave you their hearts but had been abandoned by you once you were done playing with them. Those girls that you stole from their parents and abused until they died pitifully. Those men, who were loyal to you, wanting to protect you but were ordered by you to dress up as foreigners and forced to brutally fight each other for your amusement. Do you still remember their names, Your Highness?"

Grand Prince Liang was annoyed. "Shut up!"

"I don't agree with Lu Yingying's kind heartedness. I believe in karma and anyone who has done evil should be punished. Your Highness has hurt so many people and even Lu Yingying was your victim before. Why didn't she just leave after escaping and instead come back to suffer?" Fu Rou sighed, "She said that you managed to escape the palace but returned to the Liang Residence to look for her and that is why you got captured. She could imagine your pain and disappointment when you could not find her because she believes that you have changed. She believed that you are now willing to believe in the good of the world. If she were to abandon you now, it would mean that she has lied to you. But that is not true. She said that she truly wants to live a happy life with you and become a good wife. Since she has chosen this road, she will walk with you all the way. Even if it reaches the end, her life would be worth it."

Lu Yingying's strange reasoning was what made Fu Rou agree to come on her behalf.

"She wanted me to tell you the truth. On the day that Chang'an was in chaos, she was tricked into leaving. She had to think of many ways

in order to escape and never thought of betraying you.”

Grand Prince Liang only half-believed her. “Even until now, you want to trick me. Do you think I am a fool? I won’t believe anyone! The only way for me to believe her is if she comes by herself and sits with me in prison and follows me to the depths of hell! If I can’t live, she can forget about living as well! Does she have the courage? Does she?!”

Fu Rou sighed once again, “To tell you the truth, she has already done that. If you don’t believe me, you can ask the internal attendants managing this place. They should know.”

Grand Prince Liang suddenly stomped crazily on the shattered jade bracelet. “Imperial Father has passed on and Mother has joined the temple. There is no one that cares about me! I am finally going to get what I deserve. Aren’t you all happy? All of you just want me to die! I am a prince of Great Tang. I am the Grand Emperor’s favourite son! You want me to die? I want your life!” He reached out his hand through the fence to strangle Fu Rou.

Yang Bo had accompanied Fu Rou here. He had originally planned on keeping a look out at a distance but as he saw Grand Prince Liang strangle Fu Rou, he rushed over to save her.

Fu Rou managed to get out of Grand Prince Liang’s hold as her eyes filled with disappointment. “In the end, she was the one that wrongly believed in you.”

“Let’s hurry and leave. If we alert too many people, I won’t be able to handle it.” Yang Bo urged, “Grand Prince Liang knows that his end is near and his mind is no longer thinking clearly. You won’t be able to get through to him.”

Fu Rou looked at Grand Prince Liang, who was shouting and throwing a fuss, and turned to leave. However, as soon as she left, Grand Prince Liang called the internal attendant guarding him over.

“Did you hear about Consort Liang surrendering?” He had to confirm.

“Yes, the entire palace is talking about it. They are saying that

Consort Liang is devoted to you and is willing to suffer along with you.” The internal attendant answered truthfully.

Grand Prince Liang froze for a moment. “Go and get a brush and paper for me.”

Lian Yan’er looked at the sign outside Fu Shui’s villa. For some reason, she felt uneasy. Yan Zifang did not say much as he led her inside. They walked through a bamboo forest and up onto a spacious viewing platform.

Fu Shui walked towards them and smiled lightly, looking friendly. “Lady Lian, please have a seat.”

Although Lian Yan’er sat, she remained alert. She did not even touch the wine that Fu Shui handed over to her.

“Are you afraid of me?” Fu Shui took a sip of the wine.

“I have seen many men, what is there to be afraid of? Don’t beat around the bush, what do you want to ask me?” Lian Yan’er knew that Yan Zifang was also under orders.

“I only have one question.” Then he shall be direct. “In the beginning, you told Yan Zifang that after Sheng Chujun and Sheng Chumu fell out, you personally saw Sheng Chujun barge into Sheng Chumu’s room to take the letter written for Prince Zhao. Were you telling the truth?”

Lian Yan’er frowned, “Of course I was telling the truth.”

“That means that Sheng Chumu and Sheng Chujun set up a trap and even hid it from you. They even acted out a fight in front of you?” The corner of his mouth seemed to turn up in a slight smirk.

Lian Yan’er only thought that the man in front of her was hostile. “How would I know? Anyway, I told you everything that I saw at Duke Lu’s Residence.” She was slightly nervous and lifted the cup of wine to take a sip. “You can’t possibly think that I colluded with Sheng Chumu to trick you right?”

“No, you did not lie to us.” Fu Shui suddenly ordered, “Bring him over.”

A man wearing commoner clothes was brought onto the viewing platform. Fu Shui asked the man, “Was Sheng Chumu the person that asked you to tail Lian Yan’er?”

That man summoned his courage, “I have already fallen into your hands. If you want to kill me or tear off my skin, just do it. Don’t think of...” Fu Shui lifted his hand and broke the guy’s neck.

Lian Yan’er jumped up in shock as fear crept into her eyes. Yan Zifang did not say anything as he looked on coldly.

“I heard that the previous top courtesan from Swallow House had fallen for a man and chosen to leave the scene. Where has your man gone?” Fu Shui turned the wine cup. “Being able to stay with the person you like and lead a stable life is such a blessing. What a pity, I don’t have this fortune. Lady Lian, neither do you.”

Lian Yan’er slowly stepped backward. “What do you want?”

“As soon as you went to Sheng Chumu’s side, he had started to suspect you. He even made use of you to make us believe that Sheng Chujun was siding with the Crown Prince. This resulted in Prince Han receiving the news and that is why he managed to escape the ambush. You are the reason why our plan did not succeed.”

He has always been looking for the reason. Now, he was going to deal with it even if it was too late.

“How would I know that Sheng Chumu was suspecting me? Moreover, haven’t you all already won? Neither the Crown Prince nor Prince Han is any match for Prince Zhou.” She looked at Yan Zifang before looking at Fu Shui. She decided to stay further away from these two men as she backed off towards the other side of the viewing platform.

Fu Shui remained seated. “Our victory was too narrow. It taught me a lesson. That is to make sure everything is in place. For example, the possibility that our agent becomes our opponent’s agent. I have to put

an end to it.”

Lian Yan'er suddenly felt a sharp pain in her stomach as she choked and blood spurted out from her mouth. At the same time, blood started to flow out from her eyes, ears and nose.

Yan Zifang was shocked and hurried to support her. “Lian Yan'er! Lian Yan'er!”

Lian Yan'er's gaze fell onto the wine cup on the stone table. She fell weakly into Yan Zifang's arms. Using her last breath, she said, “Don't tell him. I don't want him to be upset...”

Yan Zifang was stunned for a moment before he used his palms to close her blood-stained eyes. He glared furiously at Fu Shui, “Why did you have to kill her? Since Sheng Chumu was the one that saw through her, we can just let her leave Chang'an. Wasn't that what you promised?”

“I promised to consider. But after thinking about it, killing her was the safest option. Previously, Sheng Chumu used her and made the Eastern Palace suffer. Today, Sheng Chumu used her once again to tail her to this place. If my men were not alert and did not discover him, we would have fallen into Sheng Chumu's trap. Although this woman no longer has any use to us, she is still useful to Sheng Chumu. Letting her live would bring us problems sooner or later.”

Yan Zifang's rage continued. “She is the woman my good friend loves!”

Fu Shui's gaze turned sharp. “I will kill whoever ruins my plan. It doesn't matter if she is Ma Haihu's lover. Even if she is the Emperor's lover, I will kill her!”

Yan Zifang did not yield. “What if it is your lover?”

Fu Shui froze. Yan Zifang forced him, “If it was the person you love, would you kill her?”

Fu Shui's expression was frigid. “Everyone is selfish. What is love? I don't believe in it and will never have someone I love. You are asking the wrong person.”

Yan Zifang did not say more and he walked off.

This was not the ending that he wanted. He had discarded his morality, became a noble and rose the ranks. Yet, he had cut off his good friend's chance at happiness. The so-called power was not in his hands. He was just a knife in Fu Shui's hands. He thought that having an official position could help him get rid of his pirate identity. He thought that he could be an upright man. However, he finally realised that he was the most upright when he was a pirate. Now, he was living like a rat in a dark gutter. He was even worse than Grand Prince Liang, who knew how to repent.

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omg... so dramatic.

Sigh. Grand Prince Liang has such a hard time believing someone would truly love/care for him.

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Lu Yingying was wearing a criminal's outfit as she kneeled in front of the Emperor. Every time she met the Emperor, she was treading on thin ice. This was including the time she met him just after she got married.

The Emperor's expression was unfathomable. "I heard that you surrendered."

Lu Yingying lowered her eyes. "Yes."

"Back then when your father and brother had been imprisoned, you wore your father's armour and kneeled for several days and nights. You almost died. Today, Grand Prince Liang was part of the rebellion. You had already escaped yet you turned back to surrender yourself. In other people's eyes, they all think that you are a kind and virtuous woman."

The Emperor suddenly slammed his hand on the table and lifted a document with trembling hands. His gaze was strict. "The good things that you have done were all written down! This is the document that Grand Prince Liang wrote to accept his punishment. The first half was all about him realising his mistake and his regrets. The second half was all his angry complaints about you. The Grand Emperor directed the marriage and the Empress ignored her own health to personally prepare the wedding. This was a huge blessing. If

you were even a little grateful, you should have done your part after you married into the Liang Residence. Not only did you not serve your mother-in-law well, you were rude to her. You made use of Imperial Concubine Sun's kind and timid personality to contradict her all the time. You did not even serve her medicine after she fell sick from quarreling with you."

Lu Yingying was astonished. "Although I am young and may not understand things, I have never..."

"How dare you try to argue in front of me! No matter how indignant Grand Prince Liang is, would he lie in his last words?"

"Last words?" Lu Yingying was shocked, "Grand Prince Liang..."

Chief Cao supplemented from the side, "Grand Prince Liang has already taken poisoned wine."

Lu Yingying covered her mouth as tears streamed down her face. "In the end, was he filled with hatred towards me?"

The Emperor only took it as if she was pretending. "Grand Prince Liang has committed suicide and paid for what he did. However, these matters are separate. You neglected my younger brother. Although he is no longer around, I will deal with you on his behalf. Lu Yingying was not filial to her mother-in-law and her actions have been contradictory. She has gone against the Seven Articles. Seeing how you did not take part in the rebellion, I will help my brother divorce you. You are to be chased out immediately!"

The internal attendant pulled Lu Yingying, who was palpitating in fear, to stand and brought her out of Ganlou Palace forcefully. He pushed her to the ground once they were out. Lu Yingying crawled up and seemed to drift like a ghost, without caring which direction she was heading into. She drifted until someone blocked her path.

It was Fu Rou. She was holding a set of clothes in her hands.

"Do you remember the first time we spoke face to face? On that day, I lend you my clothes. This should be the last time." *She hoped that she could be free from today onwards.*

Lu Yingying cried, “When you saw him for the last time, did he hate me?”

“No.” Fu Rou placed the clothes over her shoulders. “In the end, not only did he admit to his mistake, he knew how to forgive. He left with the hope for you to live on happily. Yingying, because of your kindness and Grand Prince Liang’s love, the world is a better place. The both of you showed me hope.”

Li Baolin was walking in the garden when she saw a small cluster of bright yellow winter jasmine blooming by the lakeside. As she looked at these beautiful flowers, she stopped to look at them more closely.

All of a sudden, she felt raindrops on her face. She lifted her head only to realise that dark clouds had filled the sky. She rushed to a pavilion, only to bump into an internal attendant who was also trying to avoid the rain. The circular fan she was holding fell to the ground.

The internal attendant quickly picked it up and handed it over. “Please forgive me, Your Highness.”

When Li Baolin saw the internal attendant’s face, she was startled. He was the internal attendant that intentionally threw a letter on the ground on the night that Prince Zhao sent the secret letter.

A dark look flashed across the internal attendant’s eyes. “Your Highness, do you recognise me?”

Li Baolin refocused as she smiled slightly and took the fan. She spoke smartly, “I am looking at you because I don’t recognise you. You do not look familiar, did you just enter the palace?”

The internal attendant smiled and replied, “I have been in the palace for the past seven to eight years. However, I have always been serving the various chiefs in the Internal Attendant Department and did not have the fortune to send things or messages to the various concubines. As a result, I have never really shown my face to Your Highnesses and no one really recognises me.”

Li Baolin pretended to come to a realisation. “No wonder. Then why

are you in the Imperial Garden today instead of the Internal Attendant Department?"

"Your Highness, look at the weather recently, it is as if it had seen a ghost. It can be extremely sunny one moment and be flashing with lightning the next. It rains like it is pouring water. Chief Cao was worried that the road would be slippery and Your Highnesses would slip and fall. Hence, he instructed me to check the various small paths to see if there are any that needs to be repaired or swept and quickly report them."

Li Baolin praised him. "You look young but seem pretty capable."

The internal attendant was no longer on guard. "In the royal palace, if we are not capable, the days will not be easy. I don't want to hide from you but I am also good at pruning flowers and trees. In the future, if Your Highness needs any help, feel free to call me."

Li Baolin remained friendly. "You speak really well. What is your name?"

"My name is Zhi He."

Outside Ganlou Palace, the Emperor was standing under the roof as he watched the pouring rain. Fu Rou walked up to him and greeted him politely, "Thank you for being lenient and forgiving Consort Liang, Your Majesty." Deep down, everyone knew the intention of Grand Prince Liang's final letter.

"What a huge spring rain to start a good year." The Emperor drew out a long breath. "Grand Prince Liang was Grand Emperor's favourite son. He was arrogant, ruthless, reckless and treated women like weeds. Yet, he was willing to admit to his mistakes before he died. I am certain that he doesn't truly feel like he has done me wrong but he just wanted to save Lu Yingying. That is why he purposely sucked up to me."

"Your Majesty..." Fu Rou did not know what to say.

"It doesn't matter if he was real or was pretending, after all he was

willing to admit to his mistakes. He has been preposterous his entire life. However, in the end, he knew how to love a woman and tried his best to protect her. As his elder brother, I am heartened.” The Emperor turned and walked into Ganlou Palace.

Fu Rou bowed deeply towards the Emperor’s back before lifting her umbrella and walking down the steps. She walked through the pathway and listened to the sound of raindrops falling on the oiled paper umbrella. It was rare that she was feeling happy. She was not Lu Yingying and did not experience what Lu Yingying had gone through, but had learned to strive to remain as herself.

When she was about to reach the Six Offices, the rain subsided to a drizzle. Fu Rou lifted the umbrella slightly and suddenly saw Li Baolin standing in front of her, with a serious look on her face.

“I have something to tell you.” Li Baolin pulled Fu Rou back to her Huayin Palace.

After Fu Rou listened to her, she felt anxious. “Why didn’t you tell me something so important earlier?”

“Prince Zhao’s rebellion and his exposed secret letter is something that heavily implicates anyone who is even slightly involved. In the past, I would never have gotten involved.”

Fu Rou laughed, “Then what gave you the courage now?”

Li Baolin became awkward. “I forced myself. The royal palace is so big and there are so many internal attendants. Yet, I happened to bump into him in the Imperial Garden. I don’t know if he knows something and was trying to test me. I am afraid that I would be silenced before I can say anything.”

“You have done well.” Fu Rou rejoiced that she was quick-witted. “Did you see him purposely throw the letter onto the ground before alerting the guards to it?”

Li Baolin nodded definitively. “In order to catch the attention of the guards, he threw a stone to make a sound.”

Fu Rou fell silent for a while. “I understand. I will handle it.”

Li Baolin was worried. “Be careful, the Internal Attendant Department is quite powerful. It will not be good if the Six Offices go against them.”

Fu Rou smiled slightly, “He is just a low-ranked internal attendant, why would I go against the entire Internal Attendant Department?”

I feel bad for Grand Prince Liang. :(Despite him being such an evil person, he learned how to "love" in the end. In the drama, he actually could've gotten away but he returned to his residence for Yingying (because he didn't want to leave her behind). He was really disappointed when his servant told him she left willingly with Yan Zifang. But with all the evil stuff he had done, it wouldn't really be fair if he had a good ending when so many good characters have already died. Sigh.

Court Lady

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Prince Zhou was reading in his study room. He had been feeling agitated and only reading could bring him peace.

An internal attendant reported that Fu Shui was seeking an audience. Prince Zhou was not in a good mood. "I don't want to see him."

Fu Shui entered as if there was no one around. "Greetings, Your Highness."

Prince Zhou mocked, "I am feeling healthy and don't need an Imperial Physician. Or do you want to give another good idea on how to rise in the ranks and need me to be unconscious for a few days so that you can give me acupuncture?"

Fu Shui looked to the left and right of the door before closing it. "Auntie knows that you have not been feeling great..."

"You know that she is your..." Prince Zhou lowered his voice, "You know she is your aunt. All the more you should not take a risk with her life!"

"It is not that I want to push the blame. However, although the idea was mine, the entire plan was approved by Auntie. She knew the risk." Fu Shui's expression did not change. "In order to help you inherit the kingdom, Auntie was willing to take any risks."

“Kingdom, kingdom...” Prince Zhou snorted, “In all of your eyes, all you all see is the kingdom. There is no kinship.”

Fu Shui was stern, “Your Highness is wrong. For Your Highness, Auntie was willing to take the risk. This is kinship. We, the descendants of the surname Yang [1], have to take back the kingdom that belongs to Great Sui. This is the greatest kinship to our ancestors. If Your Highness does not even know this, how can you live up to the humiliation that Auntie has suffered over the past years?”

Prince Zhou chuckled coldly, “Do you really understand?”

Fu Shui sighed, “Yes! I understand! Ever since my father named me Fu Shui, I existed only to do one thing - to restore Great Sui’s glory. Nothing and no one will be able to move me.”

Prince Zhou looked at Fu Shui for a moment before speaking slowly, “Chang’an is in chaos. Prince Han managed to escape assassination and turned back to catch the Crown Prince. After you heard the news, the first thing that you chose to do was to tell Prince Han the truth that the Crown Princess was the one that killed Consort Han.”

Fu Shui froze as his expression shifted slightly.

“Mother and Yu He both think that you are very smart. As soon as you realised that Prince Han was still alive, you thought of such a brilliant plan to ruin Prince Han.” Prince Zhou’s gaze was sharp. “On that day, I was by your side and saw your expression. That expression was not your usual fierce look but it was you trying your best to cover the concern that you felt. You were worried about the Crown Prince. You were worried that if he landed in Prince Han’s hands, he would be tortured by Prince Han out of revenge for Consort Han. You pushed the Crown Princess out in order for her to bear the rage that Prince Han had for the Crown Prince. You succeeded. In the end, the Crown Princess was the one that got strangled to death by Prince Han and not the Crown Prince. You protected the Crown Prince.”

Fu Shui tried his best to explain, “Your Highness is wrong again. The Crown Prince started the rebellion and is no longer a threat to use. It is the same whether he is alive or dead. I made that decision to deal

with Prince Han and the result proves that I was right.”

Prince Zhou looked at him pitifully. “If I were you, I would take the chance to visit him while he is still alive. You have met many people in this life but there is only one that cares about you and you care about.”

They were all very pitiful. They could not get what they loved.

Fu Shui lowered his eyes, not letting any of his emotions show as he left. *He was not as lucky as Prince Zhou to be born as a prince. As a prince, Prince Zhou did not need to have blood on his hands but had people like him to get rid of the obstacles and paved the way. He still had important things to do. An internal attendant named Zhi He had disappeared. He had gone missing in Imperial Concubine Wang’s Fu An Palace. Zhi He was someone that his father always used to do things in the dark and he knew quite a bit. He did not think that a low-ranked internal attendant could create much of a wave but Imperial Concubine Wang was starting to be a problem.*

A flash of lightning split the sky. An idea popped into Fu Shui’s mind!

Fu Rou arrived at Liancui Palace and heard the sound of a wooden fish being knocked. Ever since Prince Zhao passed on, Concubine Xi had been chanting daily and was not bothered by worldly affairs. What a pity that even though that was the case, she was still seen by Concubine Yan as a nail that had to be gotten rid of.

After Zhi He had been restrained in Fu An Palace, Wei Song had interrogated him and found out that he received orders from Concubine Yan. Even the secret letter that caused Prince Zhao’s death had been done according to Concubine Yan and Yu He’s instructions.

Initially, Fu Rou thought that Concubine Yan was doing it on behalf of Prince Zhou because Prince Zhao had killed Qian Wenjing. But this could not explain why Concubine Yan kept on targeting Concubine Xi even after Prince Zhao’s death.

“Greetings, Your Highness, I am here to see if you need anything.”

Hence, Fu Rou specially made a trip here to find out if Concubine Xi had any animosity with Concubine Yan.

Concubine Xi was grateful. "I don't lack anything. You arranged for me to stay in Liancui Palace and prepared everything well. The palace maids that you sent over are all hard working and obedient. You have already done well, thank you."

Fu Rou smiled, "Please do not mention it, Your Highness. I am responsible for the Six Offices. When Your Highness was suffering, I did not realise it and this was my mistake. Thankfully, His Majesty is brilliant and personally issued an Imperial Decree such that Your Highness no longer has to suffer."

"Thank you to His Majesty's grace. However, you don't have to blame yourself. It is not your fault. There are so many people in the harem, even if you have three heads and six arms, you will not be able to take care of everything. Concubine Yan cannot stand me and she will always have the chance to strike."

There was no movement in Concubine Xi's eyes, she now took everything in stride.

"Actually, I would like to ask. Does Your Highness have any unresolved animosity with Concubine Yan? What does she have against you?"

Concubine Xi looked puzzled. "In the past, my relationship with Concubine Yan has been good. Even though we were slightly hostile, it was because I was loyal to the Empress. There was no huge animosity. I thought about it greatly but still cannot understand why she suddenly changed and wants to push me to the edge."

Something shifted in Fu Rou. "Suddenly changed? When did she change?"

Concubine Xi replied, "There was once when I went over to her residence for a while. After that, she became much colder to me."

Fu Rou pressed on, "What did you do at her residence?"

"Nothing special." Concubine Xi recalled clearly. "My cousin was an

official with duties outside the country. He returned to the capital to meet the Emperor and the Emperor allowed him to enter the palace to meet me. He brought several baskets of almond biscuits in and I brought some over to Concubine Yan. We just chatted a little and reminisced about our hometowns.”

Fu Rou wondered if the key to all these was here. “Did you accidentally say something crucial?”

“Unless the Empress asks me to say it, I don’t speak about any official business. What crucial thing could I have said? All I talk to Concubine Yan about are things that are not important... Oh right, when my cousin entered, he coincidentally saw Chief Yu and said that he looked very familiar. When I went over to Concubine Yan’s place, I looked at Chief Yu a bit more. It was a little strange. As soon as my cousin said it, I found Chief Yu familiar as well.”

Fu Rou seemed to catch onto something. “Did Concubine Yan notice?”

Concubine Xi nodded, “I told her the truth but she just smiled as said that Chief Yu has been serving in the palace for a while now and it is not like I have never seen him before. It is natural for me to find him familiar. I agreed with her. However, after I returned, I found something strange.”

Fu Rou guessed, “Maybe Your Highness met Chief Yu before you entered the palace?”

Concubine Xi shook her head. “Those that are willing to enter the palace to become an internal attendant all come from poor backgrounds. Although my status was not as high as Concubine Yan, I came from a family of officials and was a noble lady before I married. How could I have seen Chief Yu before?”

Fu Rou pondered, “Maybe I am thinking too much. May I ask Your Highness who is the cousin that you talked to?”

A sad look appeared on Concubine Xi’s face. “He died during Prince Zhao’s rebellion.”

Fu Rou thought it was all too coincidental.

1. In the novel, Concubine Yan was known as Concubine Yang, but we changed it because the names in the dramas were changed. Sorry for the confusion

I think the drama cut all of Prince Zhou and Fu Shui's scenes -"

Court Lady

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In the past few days, Sheng Chumu had been going into the mountains daily to hunt foxes. He was collecting fox skin to give his mother.

It was another bright and cloudless day. Sheng Chumu caught sight of a beautiful fire fox but his shot missed and the fire fox escaped. His luck was pretty good and when he was on his way back, he met a hunter with a wild fox on his shoulder.

“Eh, this wild fox’s skin looks nice. Are you selling?” Sheng Chumu inched his horse close to the hunter.

The hunter did not even turn around. “No.”

“I want to buy it to be filial to my mother. What if I give you two times of what it is worth?” Sheng Chumu asked patiently.

The hunter froze as he stopped walking. “Okay, I will sell it to you.”

The hunter bent down to untangle the fox and Sheng Chumu immediately walked over. He lowered his head to assess the wild fox. The hunter suddenly turned around, a silver light gleamed in his hands and he was fierce. Unexpectedly, there was no one behind him. While the hunter was stunned, a huge net fell from the top and trapped him.

Ye Qiulang and Zong Jianxiu had already ambushed him and they jumped out to restrain him. They took off his hunter cap and exposed Ma Haihu's face.

Ma Haihu struggled, "Let me go! Sheng Chumu, you despicable person! You hurt my Lian Yan'er! I want to kill you!"

Lian Yan'er had arranged to meet him and he waited for her from morning till night. He did not leave even when it rained. In the end, his heart grew cold. Lian Yan'er missed their date. However, he could not understand. Only a day had passed since she said that she wanted to marry him. How could she change her mind so quickly? His leader said that brothel girls have no feelings or loyalty. There must be another reason why she did not appear. In the end, his leader finally told the truth and said that Lian Yan'er had left. His leader said that Sheng Chumu had found out that Lian Yan'er was helping him and Sheng Chumu threatened to take her life. Lian Yan'er had no choice but to leave.

Hence, Ma Haihu came to find Sheng Chumu. He believed that as long as he killed Sheng Chumu, Lian Yan'er would return.

Ye Qiulang pressed on Ma Haihu. "Our General has long been waiting for you. Look at how much our General cares for you. In order to let you live, he pretended to hunt and prepared a net all because he did not want to accidentally kill you."

Ma Haihu gave up struggling and asked Sheng Chumu, "How did you know I was coming?"

Sheng Chumu did not say anything. Behind him, Ma Hainiu walked out. She remained silent for a while before speaking, "Brother, Leader has lied to you."

Ma Haihu's eyes widened.

The Emperor was looking through memorials when Prince Qin came to greet him.

"Imperial Father, you have been staying up late recently because of

the amount of work you have to do. I am worried about your health.”

The Emperor was touched as he waved for Prince Qin to sit beside him. “I am the ruler of Great Tang, there are a lot of things that I have to do by myself.” He pointed at the memorials that he was going through. “For example, the decision for criminals in prison. These all concern life and I have to go through all of them one by one.”

Prince Qin read the memorial out loud, “A man named Liu, has a ‘Victory’ word on his neck and said that it meant victory over the ruler. Imperial Father, is there a need to die just because one has the word ‘Victory’ tattooed on his neck and said he would rule the world?”

The Emperor thought it was good timing. “The Ministry of Justice believes that this person has offended the power of the throne and should be severely punished. Prince Qin, what do you think?”

After thinking for a while, Prince Qin replied, “We should let him go.”

The Emperor asked, “Why?”

“Great Tang has tens of thousands of citizens and there are numerous with words tattooed on them. Those that love to boast are also too many to count. If we were to punish all of them severely, how many people would we have to kill? Moreover, if he has heaven’s will and fated to rule the world, then he is not someone that the Ministry of Justice can kill. If he does not have the fate and will of heaven, so what if he tattooed the word ‘Victory’? A ruler must be broad-minded and cannot fuss and be petty over small citizens like him.”

The Emperor smiled, “Look at what I wrote.”

Prince Qin read and was delighted. His Imperial father also said to release the man. “Imperial Father is a benevolent ruler that loves his people.”

The Emperor let Prince Qin sit on his leg. “It is not easy to be a ruler. Prince Qin, let me ask you a question. If someone hurt you, would

you secretly kill him to vent your anger?”

Prince Qin shook his head. “No I won’t. Because that will go against the law.”

The Emperor continued to ask, “What if you really really hate him? What if you hate him so much that you cannot be bothered with the law? You are a prince.”

Prince Qin persisted, “No. Teacher said that someone who acts on impulse will hurt their own character. If you indulge in your own desires and act rashly without caring about anything, you may have a moment of happiness, but you will hurt your own innate character. I do not want to distort my own nature just because of an enemy. If he is in the wrong, then he should be punished according to the law. Only that way will everyone be satisfied. By abusing your own punishment, any reason will be negated. That is very stupid!”

The Emperor was slightly surprised, “Are you still learning from Court Lady Fu?”

Prince Qin replied, “Yes. Imperial Mother said that she would be my teacher so she will be my teacher for life.”

The Emperor praised, “That is good.”

The next day, during morning court, Situ Zhen once again stepped out to make an appeal. However, this time it was not to appeal on Prince Han’s behalf but to bestow the position of Crown Prince on Prince Qin. This appeal caused a huge uproar. One group supported Prince Zhou while the other group supported Prince Qin and they quarrelled endlessly.

The Emperor listened to them for a long time before finally speaking. When he spoke, he asked Fang Xuanling to not just enjoy the show.

Fang Xuanling replied that he had momentarily been absent-minded as he had been recalling the final years of the Wude era. The current Emperor had yet to ascend the throne and was pressured by the then Crown Prince Yin. At the time, the Empress had kept poison around her waist and expressed that if anything happened to the Emperor,

she would not live either.

As Fang Xuanling spoke, the old ministers started to recall the past as well. They all recollected how the Empress had gone through tough times with the Emperor in the past. This caused the Emperor to take in deep breaths as he seemed to be on the brink of tears.

In the end, although they did not come to a conclusion as to who would be the Crown Prince, the fact that Prince Zhou had been putting a lot of effort into studying court matters recently had been completely ignored.

When Concubine Yan heard the news, she was neither angry nor frustrated. Instead, she was calm. Ever since she gave birth to her son, there was not a day that she was not scheming to help her son obtain the throne. After waiting for so many years, she did not mind waiting a few more days. Moreover, the biggest obstacle had been cleared. All she had was patience.

Concubine Yan spoke, "The previous Crown Prince was the son of the Empress. He plotted to force his father to become the Grand Emperor. Prince Han is also the son of the Empress and he also disappointed the Emperor greatly. All these people brag about being loyal but how could they forget these two important things? Does it mean that as long as they are the Empress' child, they would be good?"

Yu He replied, "Your Highness is Sui Dynasty's princess. Prince Zhou is His Majesty and Your Highness' child. The two royal blood of Yang and Li flows within him. When it comes to it, Prince Zhou's bloodline is still more valuable than children from the Empress."

"How could they not understand that? It is because they know it too well and that is why they are more fearful. They don't want the Sui Dynasty's Yang family to revive. However, can they stop heaven's will?" Concubine Yan chuckled coldly, "Since they say that Prince Qin is the son of the Empress and is guided by heaven's will, then let them open their eyes and witness heaven's will."

*Anyone who poses a hindrance to her son will not have a good ending.
This was heaven's will.*

The Yan thing is really confusing. As mentioned in the previous chapter(s), Concubine Yan is supposed to be Concubine Yang. I didn't want to change it to Yan blood because the Yan in her name is definitely not the right word. Concubine Yan's Yan is 颜 (which means colour). The royal blood should be Yang (which is 杨) Yang is a very common Chinese last name. Meanwhile, I have never seen anyone with the character 颜 for their last name. It just seems too wrong to change it to the Yan blood, especially when it's royalty related.... Also, Yan Zifang's Yan is 严 (which means strict). Chinese can be really confusing since the pinyin may look the same and they may also sound alike, but it's actually a different character.

If you guys are confused, just remember that it's supposed to be YANG for Concubine Yan. It was just changed to Yan for the drama, due to Chinese censorship. I have only changed her name to Concubine Yan, but her bloodline is still Yang.

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It was raining again. There was lightning and thunder as well. Fu Rou closed the window and suddenly heard the sound of the door opening. She turned back to see Xiao Lu rushing in. She was completely drenched.

It was time for class and Xiao Lu was usually tasked to fetch Prince Qin. Unexpectedly, only Xiao Lu was present.

Fu Rou immediately asked, “Why are you the only one? Where is Prince Qin?”

She had heard about the debate that happened during morning court and subconsciously felt that she had to be more careful from here on.

Xiao Lu replied, “We were walking halfway when it started to rain heavily. His Highness is hiding from the rain under the fake mountain while I came to grab an umbrella.”

Fu Rou looked for an umbrella while instructing, “The rain is so heavy and the sky is dark. In the future, if something like this happens again, you cannot leave His Highness there alone.”

Xiao Lu made a sound of acknowledgement. However, when the two of them rushed to the fake mountain, Prince Qin had disappeared.

“He said that he would wait for me. Where has he gone?” Xiao Lu frowned. “But before that he said that he wanted to go to Fu An Palace to hide from the rain.”

A lightning flashed and bent weirdly, striking Fu An Palace. There was a huge explosion sound.

Fu Rou and Xiao Lu exchanged looks as they ran towards Fu An Palace. As soon as they entered Fu An Palace’s main gate, they saw that one of the two huge trees in the garden had been snapped in half because of the lightning strike and had caught on fire.

“Court Lady Fu! Prince Qin is there!” Xiao Lu shouted and pointed to the other tree.

Prince Qin was lying on the ground. For some unknown reason, he was not moving. Thunder rumbled in the sky. Lightning flashed through the clouds. Fu Rou did not care about herself as she dashed under the tree to carry Prince Qin.

Another lightning struck!

Fu Rou thought that it was going to hit the tree and quickly used her body to protect Prince Qin. However, that lightning did not strike the tree but hit a corner of Fu An Palace.

As soon as Fu Rou saw that, she reacted quickly and carried Prince Qin once again, running away from the tree. A horrifying sound could be heard behind her. She turned back only to see that the tree that Prince Qin had been under was now burnt from the third lightning strike.

Xiao Lu ran to Fu Rou’s side and sheltered them with the umbrella. “That scared me to death! It almost...”

Fear lingered in Fu Rou’s heart. *The fourth lightning struck!*

Someone shouted, “Imperial Concubine Wang!”

Someone else shouted, “This is bad, Imperial Concubine Wang has been hit! Quick call the Imperial Physician!”

Lightning and thunder flashed and sounded at the same time. Fu An Palace was on fire. Sand and stones were everywhere and the smell of burnt earth and wood filled the air. Everyone was frantic as they were shrieking and crying out miserably.

Fu Rou did not say anything as she carried Prince Qin without letting go. Xiao Lu's face was pale as she tightly held the corner of Fu Rou's robe. The two of them looked at the scene in front of them, not knowing what to do and not being able to do anything.

The next day, Fu Rou heard that the Emperor intended to send Imperial Concubine Wang back to Qingxiu Temple. She rushed to Concubine Yan's palace to meet the Emperor. She knew that after what happened the previous night, everyone was saying that Imperial Concubine Wang had angered the heavens. That is why there was such a frightening lightning storm, one after the other. However, she felt that there was something amiss.

"Your Majesty, in the Fourth Volume of < <Huainanzi> > -- Forms of Earth, it was written that when Yin and Yang converge, it becomes thunder. When they scatter, it appears in the form of lightning. Wang Tong of the Han Dynasty also wrote that thunder and lightning is due to the movement of Yin and Yang. When they meet, they entangle and the entanglement causes arousal. Wang Tong believes that the saying of which lightning is because of the fury of heaven is fabricated. That is why he added the chapter on lightning principles in his analects." Fu Rou explained.

Concubine Yan looked as if she wanted to laugh. "Court Lady Fu, you really read any random thing. Has this Wang Tong held any high-ranking position?"

Fu Rou glanced at Prince Zhou.

Prince Zhou had no way out. "Wang Tong was only a low-ranking official in one of the counties. However, the analects that he had written have some qualities to it. I was the one who recommended this book to Court Lady Fu."

Concubine Yan did not look happy.

Fu Rou continued, "Moreover, Your Highness, I believe that this is just a natural phenomenon, not something caused by mankind. After Prince Qin woke up, he told me that while he was hiding from the rain under the fake mountain, someone knocked him out. When I found him, he was sitting under a tree in the Fu An Palace. If I had been a step late, he would have been burnt along with the tree. Someone is trying to kill Prince Qin. They know that tall trees would be hit by lightning and that's why they placed the unconscious Prince Qin there."

Concubine Yan cut in, "The lightning strikes were a sign from heaven. It is extremely rare. Who would have known which tree would get hit? This is too much of a fluke to try to hurt Prince Qin. Prince Qin is still very young. Yesterday night, the thunder was extremely loud. Children may be scared and it is normal for them to run under trees to hide."

"Why would Prince Qin say that someone knocked him out for no reason?" Fu Rou did not give in either.

Yu He spoke, "Court Lady Fu, you almost lost your life rescuing Prince Qin from under the tree. Prince Qin may have been afraid of getting scolded if he told you the truth. Hence, he did not dare to tell you that he ran underneath the tree on his own and could only make up the story of having been knocked unconscious."

Fu Rou faced the Emperor. "Your Majesty, Prince Qin does not lie. I suspect that someone is acting maliciously."

Concubine Yan threw Prince Zhou a look. He hesitated before speaking, "Court Lady Fu, if you want to tell Imperial Father that this was caused by someone, you have to bring proof first for Imperial Father to believe you. In this world, who can tell which tree will be hit by lightning? Do you have proof?"

Fu Rou was momentarily speechless.

Prince Zhou continued, "The weather, thunder and lightning, droughts, floods and earthquakes are all warnings from heaven. Since ancient times, people already knew this. In the past, when a drought calamity hit, Han Wendi released an Imperial Decree to ask the

government where they had failed. In the eight years of Yongping, there was a solar eclipse. Han Wendi ordered the various ministries to correct their duties. Imperial Father is the Emperor and he is connected to heaven. Yesterday night, the lightning struck Fu An Palace, there is a sign from heaven. Court Lady Fu, not only are you advising Imperial Father against listening to the deeper meaning from heaven, you are also trying to insinuate that someone is plotting something. What are you trying to achieve?"

Fu Rou only hated that time was too rushed and she did not have time to collect evidence.

"I once granted Court Lady Fu with the permission to speak in front of me. She can say anything she wants to and she says it out of loyalty. Prince Zhou, do not make things difficult for her." The Emperor helped her out.

Prince Zhou let out a breath of air. "Okay." He was also caught in the middle and could not offend either side.

Concubine Yan took over. "Your Majesty, we can always check if Imperial Concubine Wang has good intentions in the future. However, we must not ignore the sign from heaven. If I may be so bold as to request for Your Majesty to send Imperial Concubine Wang out of the palace to Qingxiu Temple. If we find out in the future that Imperial Concubine Wang has done nothing wrong, we can always invite her back."

Fu Rou was anxious. "Your Majesty..." She wanted to gain some time.

The Emperor made a decision. "Let's send Imperial Concubine Wang to Qingxiu Temple first. We can talk about it later. Concubine Yan, from today onwards, you will be in-charge of the Six Offices."

Concubine Yan was secretly delighted. "Yes, Your Majesty."

The Emperor then turned to Fu Rou. "Court Lady Fu, Concubine Yan's health is weak and she cannot be too tired. As a court lady, you should try your best to help Concubine Yan."

Fu Rou lowered her eyes. “I will do my utmost best to protect the peace in the Six Offices.”

Court Lady

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After Fu Rou sent Imperial Concubine Wang off, Wei Song told her that Zhi He had died in the lightning incident.

Wei Song sighed, lamenting that there were times where heaven was blind as well. Fu Rou, however, did not believe in such things and she headed to Fu An Palace to check. She then found a clue under the tree that Prince Qin had been lying at. She did not act rashly and first went to consult a grand scribe. She found out that there was going to be another heavy rain, accompanied with lightning and thunder. She then invited the Emperor to Fu An Palace.

Although the Emperor came, he was visibly unhappy. “Instead of going to Ganlou Palace to meet me, you asked me to walk through the rain in the middle of the night to a ruined palace. You are the only female official with such guts. If you don’t give me a good reason, I will punish you severely.”

Fu Rou replied, “If tonight’s thunderstorm causes Fu An Palace to once again be struck by lightning, it is heaven blessing Great Tang with good fortune to flourish.”

“Lightning strikes are not common. Yesterday night, Fu An Palace has already been struck by lightning, how can it be so coincidental that tonight...” The Emperor did not even complete his sentence before a flash of lightning cut through the sky and struck the remains of Fu An

Palace.

The Emperor was shocked, “What is going on?”

Fu Rou knelt, “Your Majesty, yesterday night, Fu An Palace was not destroyed because of the so-called heaven’s will. It was because someone had meddled with it and intentionally attracted the lightning strike!” She waved and instructed people to bring the burnt flagpole over. Where the flagpole was broken, there was a glistening yellow colour.

“I have asked a craftsman to analyse this. It is made from brass. We have always been using wooden flagpoles to hang auspicious coloured flags around the palace. This time, however, the colourful flags used to celebrate Imperial Concubine Wang’s birthday were made from brass. These brass flag poles were covered up by ink. However, as soon as there is rain, the outer layer of ink would be washed off and expose the brass inside. I don’t exactly know how this is able to attract lightning. However, at every corner of Fu An Palace that had been struck, there would be a brass flagpole. Therefore, Chief Wei and I prepared a test and would like Your Majesty to witness it.”

“This was entirely Court Lady Fu’s idea.” Wei Song knelt and reported, “It was rumoured that before the incident happened at Fu An Palace, these brass flag poles had been secretly placed at the highest points of Fu An Palace. Moreover, the tree that was struck first was the highest tree in Fu An Palace.”

The Emperor touched the brass flag pole. “So you are saying that these flag poles attracted the lightning?”

Fu Rou continued, “Your Majesty, that lightning just now had struck the brass flag pole directly. Even if it sounds unimaginable, we can see clearly what happened. They are the true reason why Fu An Palace had been struck by lightning.”

The Emperor had had his suspicions and now, the truth was right before him. “Demons and monsters, how dare they try to fool around under my watch. I will not let them go easily! Wei Song, how did these brass flag poles enter Fu An Palace? Go and investigate now!”

Wei Song had already investigated. “All of Imperial Concubine Wang’s birthdays are settled by Concubine Zhen. I heard that the idea of wrapping these flagpoles with red silk for luck was also her idea.”

The Emperor’s gaze hardened. “This has implicated the harem. Concubine Yan is in charge of the Six Offices. Summon Concubine Zhen to Concubine Yan’s palace now. I have to interrogate her personally.”

Wei Song acknowledged.

The Emperor looked at Fu Rou. “Follow me.”

The group of them reached Concubine Yan’s palace. Concubine Zhen was already kneeling with a frightened look on her face.

As soon as she saw the Emperor, she wailed, “Your Majesty, I have been wrongly accused! It is true that I used colourful flags to decorate Fu An Palace but the flag poles used were made out of wood. I personally touched and saw it. It was definitely made out of wood! How could it possibly turn into brass? Moreover, I have nothing against Imperial Concubine Wang and even agree with her ways. Why would I hurt Imperial Concubine Wang?”

“Concubine Zhen makes sense. Imperial Concubine Wang is old and has no animosity with anyone. There is no need for her to put in so much effort to hurt Imperial Concubine Wang.” Concubine Yan’s tone changed, “The person she is trying to hurt must be Prince Qin.”

Concubine Zhen was stunned. “Do not accuse me!”

Concubine Yan’s gaze was cold. “Prince Qin is well-liked by His Majesty and does not pose a problem to you. However, things change with time.”

Concubine Zhen shouted, “Your Majesty, that is not true! Concubine Yan is spouting absolute nonsense. She is jealous that I am pregnant with your child and is trying to frame me!”

Yu He clapped and internal attendants immediately brought Concubine Zhen’s personal maid, Wutong, in. It was obvious that she had been tortured.

Fu Rou frowned. *Concubine Yan moved very quickly.*

Concubine Yan guided patiently, “Wutong, don’t be afraid. His Majesty is present. Tell us everything that you saw and heard.”

Wutong wore a frightened expression as her voice sounded empty, “After Concubine Zhen got pregnant, she thought that His Majesty would focus solely on her. She never thought that not only would His Majesty not visit her often, he would frequently go visit Concubine Yan. Concubine Zhen was furious and complained several times. She once said that Li Chengqian was incapable and threw away his precious Crown Prince position. Now that Great Tang was going to have a new Crown Prince, every prince had a chance. If she gave birth to a son, he would be His Majesty’s youngest son. She also said that men always doted on their youngest child. Back then, Lady Gouyi gave birth to Prince Fuling. Because Prince Fuling was Emperor Wu’s youngest son, he made Prince Fuling the Crown Prince.”

Concubine Zhen was on the receiving end of the Emperor’s glare and she could not help but admit, “I have always trusted this traitor and when no one is around, I would joke around with her but do not mean it. How dare she use it to stir up trouble now. Your Majesty, you know me the best, I just like to talk but I never truly harmed anyone. Your Majesty, I really didn’t do it!”

“Your Majesty, I have made a mistake. I am in charge of the Six Offices but never found this poisonous snake hiding in the harem. I have failed my duties.” With this, Concubine Yan wanted to punish her as an example to others.

Concubine Zhen was aghast, “Concubine Yan, you...”

Fu Rou spoke, “Your Majesty, other than a notice, abilities are also necessary in order to hurt others. Although this palace maid, Wutong, is witness to the complaints that Concubine Zhen has made, is Concubine Zhen actually capable of doing something like this? Where would she get so many brass flag poles? How did she manage to switch the wooden flag poles for brass ones without anyone knowing?”

Concubine Zhen seemed to become alert. “Your Majesty, Court Lady Fu is right. The flag poles were all brought by people from the Internal Attendant Department.”

Fu Rou continued, “The brass flag poles were covered with dye to make it look like wooden flag poles. But the difference in weight between a brass flag pole and a wooden flag pole is obvious and anyone would notice it just by holding it. Why did no one from the Internal Attendant Department question this? Could Concubine Zhen have bought over everyone from the Internal Attendant Department?”

Concubine Zhen hurriedly provided a clue, “An internal attendant named Yang Sheng was the one that coordinated the hanging of the colourful flags. They were all Yang Sheng’s men. He was also the one who took the flag poles from the storage.”

The Emperor immediately called for Yang Sheng to be summoned. Yang Sheng was brought over.

Concubine Zhen looked like she had caught onto her chance of survival. “That’s him! He must have been the one that did it! He was the one that caused Fu An Palace to be struck by lightning! Yang Sheng, why would you do such a crazy thing? Tell us! Hurry and admit to your crime!”

Yang Sheng first stared deeply into Concubine Zhen’s eyes, as if to tell her to rest assured. He then turned to the Emperor. “Your Majesty, everything was done by me. I was once reprimanded by Imperial Concubine Wang for a small mistake and I wanted to be transferred to Prince Qin to do small tasks. However, Prince Qin said that he did not lack anyone and did not want me. I already hated him. I heard that when brass poles are placed high up, they would be able to attract lightning. Therefore I took the chance when Concubine Zhen was decorating Fu An Palace to change the wooden poles to brass ones. This entire thing was done by me. Concubine Zhen knows nothing about it. Please do not wrongly blame Concubine Zhen, Concubine Zhen is innocent! My relatives outside the palace have already died long ago. I will take responsibility for my own actions!”

As soon as he finished speaking, he ran and struck his head against a

pillar.

...so dramatic...

Court Lady

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It was too sudden and no one could stop Yang Sheng in time. They all stared as he fell to the ground, with blood covering his face.

“Take care, Your Highness...I will repay your kindness in my next life...” Yang Sheng smiled at Concubine Zhen as he took his last breath.

Concubine Zhen was frightened stiff. “Your Majesty, I am innocent! I won’t be able to clear my name even if I jump into the Yellow River!”

Fu Rou was calm. “Your Majesty, Yang Sheng killed himself to escape punishment. However, this situation does not only implicate Yang Sheng from the Internal Attendant Department. Those that shifted the brass flag poles...”

An internal attendant rushed in. “Your Majesty, those internal attendants that were close to Yang Sheng have all committed suicide!”

Concubine Yan took the chance while she had the advantage. “Yang Sheng said that he was indebted to Concubine Zhen. It is obvious that he listens to her. Your Majesty, please give your order on how to deal with Concubine Zhen.”

Fu Rou could tell Concubine Yan was going to force the situation to her favour again. This time, she was not going to let Concubine Yan

get what she wanted.

“Your Majesty, Concubine Zhen is pregnant with royal blood. According to the palace rules that Empress Zhangsun personally set, if a concubine is pregnant, they can only be punished after they have given birth to Your Majesty’s child. Moreover, we have not properly investigated whether Concubine Zhen is guilty.”

The Emperor looked at Concubine Zhen with a slightly unwilling expression. He was about to speak when there was more news. Imperial Concubine Wang had been tired out from her journey in the carriage and her injury had worsened. As soon as she entered Qingxiu Temple, she had passed on.

Concubine Yan took the chance once again. “Imperial Concubine Wang died because Fu An Palace was struck by lightning. Concubine Zhen claims she did not know about the brass flag pole, but if she did not instruct people to hang the colourful flags, how would Yang Sheng have had the opportunity? Imperial Concubine Wang is dead, Concubine Zhen has to bear the consequences.”

“Concubine Yan is right.” Fu Rou suppressed the sorrow she was feeling as she agreed with Concubine Yan. However, she ignored the stunned expression that Concubine Yan gave her and continued, “Imperial Concubine Wang is dead, Concubine Zhen should bear the consequences. She should personally ask for forgiveness from Imperial Concubine Wang’s coffin. I am willing to help send Concubine Zhen to Qingxiu Temple to pay respects and accompany Imperial Concubine Wang’s spirit. For one, it is to console Imperial Concubine Wang’s spirit. Secondly, Qingxiu Palace is a peaceful place and will be able to reduce the thoughts that Concubine Zhen should not be having. She would also be able to go about her pregnancy safely.”

Concubine Zhen knew that this was her only chance to escape unscathed. “I will sincerely ask for forgiveness in front of Imperial Concubine Wang’s spirit and do my best to accompany her.”

The Emperor thought about it and slowly nodded. He felt guilty. If he had investigated the situation clearly, Imperial Concubine Wang would not have died. Hence, he was going to be more meticulous on

this issue with Concubine Zhen.

Resentment flashed across Concubine Yan's face.

Fu Rou saw it but did not say anything. She was going to try her best to protect as many as she could.

Fu Shui followed the internal attendant to the prison cell that the Crown Prince was in. He heard from the internal attendant say that the Crown Prince was not eating and he was worried that something would happen to the Crown Prince. He felt indescribably gloomy. His father had instructed him to get rid of the Crown Prince today to prevent any repercussions in the future. He knew that this day was bound to come.

As Fu Shui walked into the prison, he saw the Crown Prince sitting with his eyes closed. Although his face was pale, he was at peace. It was an acknowledgement of fate after losing everything. An unexplainable sorrow washed over him as he opened the medicine box and took out a grilled fish. He delivered it to the Crown Prince.

The Crown Prince opened his eyes and looked at Fu Shui without saying anything. Fu Shui spoke first, "Although it is slightly cold, it still tastes nice."

The Crown Prince could not understand. "I have nothing left, why did you come?"

Fu Shui spoke simply, "Since you have nothing left, you should believe that I came without any intentions this time."

The Crown Prince took the grilled fish and bit into it. Pain flashed through Fu Shui's eyes.

The Crown Prince suddenly asked, "Was Prince Han the one that caused me to become disabled and placed poison in the saddle?"

"What's done is done. Even if you know the truth now, it is impossible for you to rise again." *The truth was extremely cruel.*

"It is impossible. But there is only you and me here. I don't want to be a foolish ghost. Tell me. Was it really Prince Han?"

"No, Prince Han was not the one that placed poison in the saddle."
Even if he knew, it was too late.

The Crown Prince asked again, "What about when You Jianming appealed to abdicate me and give the Crown Prince position to Prince Han?"

Fu Shui shook his head. "He was not instructed by Prince Han."

The Crown Prince had been frustrated for a long time. He chuckled bitterly, "Biological brothers killing each other. Why did we do it?"

"It is not your fault, it is fate's fault. Fate made you Li Chengqian and the Emperor's first son. It was also fate that made me Yang Fu Shui."
They were destined to part ways.

"Then was it fate that made me treat you like a close friend? Was it fate that made me promise to protect you? Fu Shui, in this world, there is fate but there are also humans' hearts. I have already ruined myself but you have a chance. If you can live on, I hope you would be able to live truly, smile and cry." *Fate made them pitiful people.*

Fu Shui looked at the Crown Prince. "I am sorry."

The Crown Prince opened his mouth as his expression changed. His throat made choking sounds until he could not make any more sounds. The grilled fish dropped to the ground. He touched his throat and slowly fell on the hay.

Fu Shui lowered his eyes, his expression unreadable. "I personally made this. When the medicine takes effect, your throat will be numb and you will not be able to speak. Compared to other drugs, its effect takes a longer time to set in. However, only this medicine will be undetectable when the autopsy is done. You have not eaten for days. When the Emperor sends someone to check your body, they will believe that you have starved to death."

The Crown Prince looked at Fu Shui. In his gaze, there was no hatred. Only sorrow.

Fu Shui could not bear to look and turned his head away slightly. “It is because my surname is Yang. My father is Emperor Yang’s son. I am Emperor Yang’s grandson. My only use is to let Great Sui regain its former glory. It was my intricate plan to make the Eastern Palace and Han Mansion have all sorts of misunderstandings such that you both will end up fighting against each other brutally. You were stupid, and you trusted the wrong person. I was never the close friend in your heart. Ever since the beginning, I got close to you only to think of how to destroy you.”

The Crown Prince struggled to reach out towards Fu Shui.

Fu Shui hesitated but grabbed the Crown Prince’s hand in the end. Seeing how the Crown Prince’s breathing got more and more difficult, he suddenly knelt down and hugged him tightly, hot tears streaming down his face.

A strong desire that he had never felt before burst forth in him. He wanted to follow his heart just once. Fu Shui took out a pill bottle and poured out a pill. He placed it in the Crown Prince’s mouth.

I was really shocked by this...

Court Lady

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In a single move, Sheng Chumu finished Fu Shui's villa. Although the people in there either fought to death or committed suicide, he managed to find an old Sui Dynasty flag. In the rear mountain, he found an unrecognisable female corpse. He guessed that this was the missing Lian Yan'er.

This incident attracted the attention of various officials under Situ Zhen's lead and the Emperor could not ignore it.

Situ Zhen spoke frankly. Emperor Yang's daughter, Concubine Yan, gave birth to Prince Zhou and he is a descendent of the Sui Dynasty. He could not ascend the throne. Even Fang Xuanling, who did not take a side on issues like choosing the Crown Prince, suggested letting Prince Qin be the Crown Prince. Prince Zhou should assist as best as he could. The position of power was fixed and no one would criticize Prince Zhou.

The Emperor did not immediately express his stand and merely asked Prince Qin to go to Daci'en Temple to prepare the Empress' Luck Ceremony. They would make a decision when he returned.

When everyone heard this, they could read in between the lines. It was clear that the Emperor had intentions to crown Prince Qin as the Crown Prince.

When Sheng Chumu walked out of Ganlou Palace, he saw Fu Rou

waiting by the side and immediately turned his head to the other side. He walked past her as if he did not see her. Although Fu Rou did not feel good, she did not show it.

The Emperor summoned Fu Rou. He wanted her to accompany Prince Qin along with Linghu Deguan as their guard.

Fu Rou was about to leave when an internal attendant came in to report. He said that Prince Han was throwing a tantrum because the person in-charge of him did not buy him the beauty ointment. Prince Han had knocked over a fire pan and almost burned down a room.

The Emperor had a headache.

Fu Rou thought that it was about time. “Your Majesty, a dragon playing in shallow waters will also be disturbed by fishes and shrimps. In the past, Prince Han lived like a prince, now he is under house arrest because of his mistake. The people looking after him might not be as respectful to him as in the past. I heard that there were even servants that dared to mock Prince Han directly. Prince Han must have been agitated. Moreover, ever since Your Majesty punished Prince Han, you have never called in Prince Han, much less teach him. A child’s mistake...” She did not complete the saying, taking care not to overdo it.

The Emperor took over, “...is my failure right?” He pondered for a moment. “Pass down my decree. Prince Han is released from house arrest. Summon him to the palace and lock him up with the Crown Prince.”

Fu Rou wanted to laugh and cry. She had wanted to help Prince Han but got the opposite result. Therefore, there were times where she should not be a smart aleck. This time, she only wished that Prince Han and the Crown Prince would be safe and not make things worse.

Prince Han walked into the prison cell and saw the Crown Prince seated in the corner. His face immediately changed.

“Open the door. Change my prison cell.” *The internal attendant’s prison*

was so big. Why did they have to share the same cell?

The internal attendant laughed as he was put in a spot. "This is His Majesty's order and I cannot disobey. Please pardon me, Your Highness." It was not easy to keep watch of the Internal Attendant Prison. All the prisoners were of royal blood. They may be unlucky now but may be able to bounce back the next moment.

Seeing how the internal attendant did not even turn back, Prince Han had no choice. However, as he turned around, the Crown Prince's face appeared in front of him.

"Why did you sneak up on me?" Prince Han jumped as he wrapped his hands into meaty fists. "Our subordinates are gone and our consorts are dead. Our wings are gone and there is only you and me left. Very good, Li Chengqian. If you are capable, let's fight one on one."

The Crown Prince wrapped his hands slowly around Prince Han's fists. "This pair of hands strangled the Crown Princess."

Prince Han shook off his hands. "That's right! I was the one that strangled the Crown Princess. My consort died because of her, how can I not take revenge? My consort has always treated her so well. Our wives could have had a peaceful relationship and helped strengthen ours..." As he spoke, his nose clogged up and tears formed in his eyes. "I was the one that emphasised and reminded her to send that plate of jujube cakes into the Eastern Palace. If I had known...if I had known...even if I made Imperial Mother angry, I would not have tried to make you happy."

The Crown Prince suddenly pressed his hands on his face as his entire body trembled. It was clear that he was in extreme pain. "No, it was because of me... that's why the Crown Princess...I am the one who let her down. I harmed her..."

Seeing the Crown Prince in this state, pain filled Prince Han. "I also hurt my consort...if not for me, she would not have died..."

Both brothers sat in separate corners, their faces cold.

The Crown Prince spoke, "The poison under the saddle..."

Prince Han replied, "I didn't do it."

The Crown Prince said, "I know."

Prince Han was shocked. "Back then when I tried to explain it to you, you did not believe me. Why do you believe me now?"

"I don't know why but I believe you now. It feels like someone has told me the truth. You were not the one responsible for the saddle..." The Crown Prince struggled to recall, only to feel his head start to hurt. He grabbed onto his head.

Although at the last moment Fu Shui gave the antidote to the Crown Prince, the poison had affected his memories and everything was a blur to him now.

Prince Han did not mind. "It is too late to be remorseful." However, he himself got caught up in memories. "When I was young, I heard my tutor say that the sun can be used to tell the time. I asked my teacher for many days before I finally managed to make my own sundial. I brought it to you happily but you simply threw it in the box you used for junk."

"You were clumsy. In order to make that sundial, you got many cuts on your hands. If I had cherished it, it would only encourage you to continue doing those kinds of strenuous yet unrewarding handicrafts. I was afraid that you would be happy and want to make another one, adding more injuries to your hands."

Prince Han was silent.

The Crown Prince spoke, "When I broke my leg, your Han Mansion sent a skinless tiger's claw. You mocked me cruelly."

Prince Han shouted in indignance, "Who exactly is creating misunderstandings between us? My Han Mansion sent ginseng. We have never sent a tiger's claw. I swear on Imperial Mother's spirit in heaven. If there is any lie in my words, I will be struck by lightning!"

The Crown Prince fell silent.

Yu He slapped Fu Shui. “Why is the Crown Prince still alive?”

Today, he had gone to the Imperial Physician Department and found out that the Crown Prince was finally eating normally all thanks to his son. He clearly sent Fu Shui to get rid of the Crown Prince. He never expected Fu Shui to disobey him. *This was something that had never happened before!*

Fu Shui’s expression was calm. “He has already lost everything and will never be able to bounce back. Why do we have to kill him?”

Yu He glared at him furiously. “Since when did you know how to sympathise with the enemy? The Li family killed your grandfather and stole our Great Sui!”

“But no matter what, he treats me as his own. I have already betrayed him. If I take his life, how different will I be from a beast?” Fu Shui lowered his eyes. “I have already done so much for you and I will trade it for his life. If you persist on killing him, don’t blame me for being heartless.”

“You!” Yu He never thought that his son would be so determined for the Crown Prince. This was the most critical time and they should be united. They could not lose something bigger because of this small issue. “Forget it. As long as the Crown Prince never leaves the prison, I can forget it temporarily.”

The atmosphere between the father and son momentarily grew cold.

Concubine Yan walked out from the side palace fuming. She failed to realise the weird tension between them. “I never thought that even after the Empress is gone, she could still win over the old ministers. I am afraid that the Emperor has decided to make Prince Qin the Crown Prince.”

Yu He was humble. “It is all because we were careless. We did not expect Sheng Chumu to raid Fu Shui’s villa and find Great Sui’s flag, causing us to become passive.”

Fu Shui stepped forward. “Your Highness, please do not be worried.

Sheng Chumu did not manage to get any live witnesses. It will be difficult to accuse us of anything just from an old flag. As for Prince Qin, he can escape now but he won't be able to escape forever. I have already made arrangements. He will leave but never be able to return."

Concubine Yan let out a sigh. "Thankfully, we have you to help us. If not, no matter how I try, it would be difficult for me to achieve anything. The Emperor looks like he dotes on me and Prince Zhou but he has always made his own decisions as he wishes. As soon as Prince Qin is crowned the Crown Prince, the road will definitely be paved for him. At that time, Prince Zhou will be forced to return to his feudal land. In the end, he would just be an empty rich lord."

"Great Sui has hope because there is Your Highness and Prince Zhou. You give value to my existence. I will definitely do my best to help Prince Zhou ascend the throne."

Concubine Yan nodded. "Good! Good child!"

Yu He glanced at his son, his frown easing. *Thankfully, he still had the bigger picture in mind.*

Fu Shui noticed his father's expression and felt slightly at ease. *It seems like the Crown Prince would be able to live for the time being.*

The road was bumpy as the group headed to Qingxiu Temple and Daci'en Temple. Fu Rou pulled open the carriage's curtains and looked at the beautiful spring mountain scenery. The camellia had started to wilt, while the flowers greeting spring started to bloom. There were also all sorts of wild flowers. Even the best embroidery would not be able to depict the brilliance of the entire mountain.

There was not a single spot that was splendorous, yet it was so beautiful that it caught her breath. She could breathe easily and relax. There was no need to worry about the eyes in the dark, trying to conspire to kill others.

Of course, she was not only looking at the scenery. Occasionally, she

would look to the front and back. In front of her was Prince Qin's carriage and behind her was Concubine Zhen's carriage. She had to watch both sides. All of a sudden, the wind blew the curtains of the carriage behind her open. She caught sight of Concubine Zhen vomiting.

Fu Rou thought about it and asked Linghu Deguan, who was riding a horse beside her. "General, is it time for us to stop and rest? We are used to the comfort in the palace and can't take it in the carriage; especially since we are traveling on mountain roads. I feel giddy."

Linghu Deguan raised his brows. "This...I'll have to ask Prince Qin."

Fu Rou smiled slightly, "Of course. Thank you, General."

Prince Qin heard that Fu Rou wanted to rest and was naturally fine with it. The group stopped at a gradual slope and Fu Rou appeared before the pale Concubine Zhen. She handed over a small bottle.

"This is a scent that the Empress always brought with her when she went travelling. It clears your mind and raises your spirits. It doesn't harm pregnant women either." Before they left, she had reminisced about the time when she accompanied the Empress to Cangshan Mountain. When she was brought back to reality, she had already packed it.

Concubine Zhen hesitated but took it in the end. She smelled it and felt a lot better.

"Court Lady Fu--" Concubine Zhen paused, "Thank you."

"It is no trouble, Your Highness." Fu Rou was about to leave.

"I thanked you not only for this bottle." Concubine Zhen spoke once again, "I don't have very good relationships in the palace and have never rewarded or helped you with anything. Even if you help me, I can't repay you. I was accused of so many crimes, coveting the Crown Prince position, hurting Prince Qin, yet you were willing to speak up for me. Aren't you worried about getting implicated?"

Fu Rou asked in return, "Your Highness, were you really the one that tried to hurt Imperial Concubine Wang?"

Concubine Zheng shook her head. “Of course not.”

Fu Rou smiled slightly. “I thought so too.”

Concubine Zhen had a surprised look. “But in the palace, it is not just about who is right or wrong. There are also gains and losses...”

Fu Rou cut her off. “Personal gains and losses are small. The royal palace is a role model and the heart of Great Tang. If the palace is covered by lies and schemes, causing innocent people to suffer and conspirators to win, what will become of the world? If the nation is strong, the citizens are strong and Great Tang will flourish. This should be the gains and losses that matter to everyone. Be it my body or my heart, they all belong to Great Tang.”

Concubine Zhen was deeply moved. “You spoke well.”

“I am going to take a look at His Highness. Your Highness should take the chance to rest.” Fu Rou took her leave.

The Crown Prince and Prince Han are kinda getting along now...

Court Lady

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It was sunset by the time the group reached the relay station. The deputy of the relay station was already waiting for them along with two assistants. Fu Rou peered out from her carriage and saw that the three men were all burly. They did not seem like stable men but more like military personnel.

Fu Rou muttered this to herself and Linghu Deguan happened to overhear. He grew alert and looked at the deputy for a moment. When his eyes swept across the main gate, he saw shadows move past and could not help but narrow his eyes. He made a gesture and the soldiers that were about to dismount remained on their horses. He moved up to the front slowly.

“Deputy Cui, how many people do you have in this relay station?”

The deputy saw that Linghu Deguan was being meticulous and bowed. He replied formally, “According to Great Tang’s laws, a relay station of our level has one deputy, two vice-officials and four workers. There are seven of us in total. General, do you see the workers working there? They are preparing food for your horses.”

“It is indeed the rule to have four workers.” Linghu Deguan’s voice fell. “But the deputy here does not have the surname Cui!” He drew out his sword and pierced the deputy’s heart.

The two assistants showed their true colours and grabbed their

daggers. They pounced at Linghu Deguan. Linghu Deguan did not want to continue fighting as he jumped onto his horse and retreated. However, in the chaos, the carriages became disorderly and there was a blockup.

Fu Rou quickly made the decision and instructed her carriage driver to let Prince Qin and Concubine Zhen's carriage through first. She was going to be the last. As the carriage driver saw that the guards were only concerned about protecting Prince Qin's and Concubine Zhen's carriage and were growing further and further away from them, he panicked and whipped the horse hard.

The horse started acting crazily because of the pain and suddenly started running towards the forest. However, there was no route through the forest. There were even water channels. The carriage wheel accidentally slipped into a ditch and the carriage overturned. As soon as the carriage driver saw that things were going wrong, he ran away by himself.

Fu Rou was quite agile as she grabbed onto the shaft and got out of the carriage. She wanted to find the way back but when she saw her pursuers aggressively enter the forest, she could only summon her courage and run deeper into the forest. Very soon, her pursuers caught up to her.

"She's alone. She does not look like Concubine Zhen." One of the pursuers examined her and commented, "She is just a female official."

Another pursuer shouted, "Our bosses have said that it doesn't matter if we kill the wrong person, we cannot let anyone go! Kill her!"

Fu Rou fell to the ground. She had no strength to resist as she closed her eyes, resigning herself to fate. All of a sudden, a shadow jumped from the trees and chopped off her pursuer's head. One hand stretched towards Fu Rou, wanting to pull her up.

"Chumu!" As soon as Fu Rou saw the person's silhouette, she knew who it was.

Sheng Chumu merely snorted, his back exposed towards the enemies

and he got cut on the back of his waist.

“Chumu!” Fu Rou was startled. Sheng Chumu turned back to attack and cut off two heads. He pulled Fu Rou up. “Hurry and leave!”

Fu Rou hesitated, “Prince Qin and...”

Sheng Chumu was pissed. “Care about your own life first, Court Lady Fu!”

In the beginning, Sheng Chumu was the one leading Fu Rou away. However, he slowly grew weaker and allowed Fu Rou to support him. In the end, they lost their footing and slipped down a steep hill and ended up in front of a hidden mountain stream.

It was a fierce night but the moon was beautiful. The moonlight reflected over the stream, making it look like huge pearls. However, no one was in the mood to appreciate the scenery.

Fu Rou helped Sheng Chumu assess his injury as she frowned. “Your blood is black. Their weapons were covered in poison.” *No wonder he lost energy so quickly.*

Sheng Chumu leaned on a volcanic rock as he weakly replied, “It doesn’t matter if I die. I don’t need you to care.”

Fu Rou looked faintly at him, and stared into his eyes for a moment. She suddenly took out a bottle and poured out a medicine pill. She did not even ask before pulling his chin down and shoving the pill in his mouth.

“What is this?” Sheng Chumu wanted to spit it out. Thankfully, Fu Rou saw through him and quickly covered his mouth until he swallowed it.

Sheng Chumu’s embarrassment turned into fury. “If my hands and legs weren’t numb, I would not let you go! What did you feed me?”

Fu Rou finally replied, “The Pill God’s antidote.”

Sheng Chumu had heard of the Pill God. Each pill was extremely rare and precious. He never expected Fu Rou to so casually feed it to him.

He was extremely grateful but did not want to give in. His voice remained hard. "Why did you waste it on me? Without me, you and Prince Zhou can be together forever and yak on about karma."

"Not just Prince Zhou, I have good relationships with many influential officials. The pill that you just ate was returned to me by Grand Prince Liang." *She should just piss him off. If not, she would be the one that dies from excessive anger.*

"You!" As he saw Fu Rou's exceptionally beautiful complexion under the moonlight, Sheng Chumu seemed to fall in a daze. He then turned his head sharply. "Leave!" He had wasted his time secretly protecting her. It was all for nothing.

Moonlight reflected in Fu Rou's eyes. "Chumu, you better think clearly. If I leave, I will really never turn back."

Sheng Chumu opened his mouth but did not say anything. He was useless. He knew and she knew.

"After taking the antidote, it will take you another hour before you can get up. How about we take the chance to clear up our misunderstandings?" *She wanted to know if there was a future for them.*

"I have always wondered what exactly you are angry about. In the end, I understood. When I left Guangzhou, I did not get a chance to meet you and tell you what happened. That's why you thought that I was greedy for glory and chose to return to Chang'an with Prince Zhou. Right?"

Sheng Chumu snorted, "Was I wrong?"

"Yes." Fu Rou fell silent. "On that day, there were soldiers that came to check the inn because Chen You wrongly thought that you were Hong Yide's men. I rushed out of the inn to find you but unexpectedly saw my brother-in-law on trial in court. I was worried for my elder sister and had to go. Just as my elder sister and her husband were about to be wrongly accused, I exposed my identity as a female official. Prince Zhou appeared and proved that I was not lying. However, this meant that I had no choice but to return to the palace."

Sheng Chumu never expected something like this and was shocked.

“I thought that I would have a chance to explain things clearly to you once you returned to Chang’an. I did not think that you would not give me a chance to explain before sending yourself to the borders. After that, you then had Lian Yan’er by your side.” Fu Rou’s breath hitched. “Maybe you wished that I would be braver or even put aside my pride to grab onto you. However, I wished that you understood me even if I did not say anything. I wished that you would stay by my side without wavering. Chumu, have we truly drifted?”

“Rou’er...” He could not help but call out. However, his apology had dragged on for so long, he did not know where to start.

Fu Rou’s eyes moistened after hearing him call her “Rou’er”. However, she knew that the knot in both of their hearts needed time to untangle.

“I have to go and find Prince Qin. I don’t want to hide from you but I have been feeling that something is amiss with Prince Han and the Crown Prince’s fight. Now, I am close to finding the answer. Because of this, His Highness is in great danger. When Consort Han died, I was gullible and wrongly pleaded with Concubine Yan for help. However, she sent me to the Internal Attendant Prison and I could not do anything. This time, I will not let anyone be sacrificed. Hopefully from today on, you will not treat me with disdain. Even if we can’t return to the past, I hope that we do not become enemies.”

Sheng Chumu watched Fu Rou leave with a firm gaze.

He was wrong. However, he would not use flattery to get her to forgive him. He recalled that what she wanted was a hero that could support the world. A hero was not someone formed out of thin air, but built. Currently, he still lacked the maturity. However, the future is long!

Ohhh the misunderstanding has finally been resolved!! :D :D :D :D

Court Lady

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“What! Yu He is Emperor Yang’s son?” The Emperor was shocked as he looked at Concubine Xi kneeling in front of him.

Sweat droplets appeared on Concubine Xi’s forehead. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

The Emperor concentrated on her. “Tell me the details.”

Concubine Xi was cautious of her words. “I could not understand why Concubine Yan suddenly turned against me. Now that I think back, Concubine Yan’s attitude towards me changed when Your Majesty allowed my cousin, Wang Zuozhong, to enter the palace. He told me that he had coincidentally bumped into Yu He in the Imperial Garden and said that Yu He looked familiar. At that time, I did not think much of it. However, when I met Concubine Yan later on, I casually brought it up. I did not mean anything by it but I believe that it was then that Concubine Yan became wary of me. She was afraid that I would expose her, hence she has been trying to get rid of me.”

The Emperor replied, “But these are all assumptions.”

“Your Majesty, my grandfather was an official in the Sui Dynasty and I have lived in Chang’an ever since I was young. Emperor Yang took the throne when he was fourteen years old. He was always travelling around and never stayed in Chang’an for more than two-hundred days. The princes and princesses that he doted on would also be able

to travel with him while the rest were left in Chang'an. Amongst those that were left in Chang'an, there was one named Yang Lian. Because his mother's status was low and he did not gain the Emperor's favour, he was never given the prince title and was not outstanding. Back then, my cousin was his play partner for a period of time. I offended him once and was thrown into the water by him. Because of that, I got sick and stopped playing with him. After many years, things stayed the same but people changed. I never thought of him anymore. I never expected him to be in the palace and so near to me."

"How are you so sure that Yu He is Yang Lian?" *This was a serious matter.*

"As he aged, although his appearance has changed, his silhouette remains the same. In the past, I never thought of it, but now that I remember, he is looking more and more like his past self. I am very sure that he is Yang Lian! Moreover, when he was young, he had been struck by lightning once and had an ugly scar on his right arm. Your Majesty will know as soon as you check!"

As this matter was huge, the Emperor did not hesitate and immediately summoned Yu He. When Yu He entered Ganlou Palace, he saw Concubine Xi and his expression changed slightly.

The Emperor ordered immediately, "Yu He, roll up your right sleeve."

Yu He switched back to his respectful expression and calmly rolled up his sleeve, exposing half his arm.

Concubine Xi was shocked, "Ah! This...."

On Yu He's upper arm, there was a horrifying scar. However, it did not seem like it was caused by lightning but more like it had been scalded.

"I loved to play when I was younger and accidentally knocked over a pot of boiling water. That is how I got my scar." He had suspected that the scar he got when he was younger would pose danger. Hence, before he entered the palace, he intentionally scalded himself. Today, he was thankful he did so.

Concubine Xi's gaze was still suspicious.

The Emperor asked, "At what age did you scald yourself?"

Yu He replied, "Around five or six years old."

The Emperor spoke meaningfully, "At such a young age, you are quite lucky to have only scalded your right arm." He had seen a lot of crafty characters before. To try and hide their identity, they would create a new injury on top of their old injury. They had a bigger conspiracy.

Yu He could hear his insinuation. "I do not dare to hide from you. At that time, not only was my right arm scalded, a huge portion of my shoulder was scalded as well. Please forgive me for my insolence."

He took off his shirt. There was a horrifying scar on his right shoulder.

The Emperor looked at Concubine Xi before speaking to Yu He, "You can leave."

Yu He finally left. The internal attendant that the Emperor had sent to look through old files came back to report that Yang Lian had died during the chaos in Chang'an. There was a record of his death.

Concubine Xi thought about it but still felt that she recognised the right person. "Your Majesty, he could have..."

The Emperor waved dismissively and sent Concubine Xi off. He thought about it by himself for a long while. If Concubine Xi recognised wrongly, what explanation was there for Concubine Yan to keep on pressuring her? And Yu He's scar. How could it so coincidentally be on the right side as well? Moreover, he even thought of covering it up. It was frightening how detailed Yu He could be.

The Emperor immediately wrote a few Imperial Decrees and requested for the internal attendants to deliver them quickly. He then called Concubine Yan over before he took a sip of tea.

"Cao Yangde, am I right to do this?" The Emperor was not really

asking for a suggestion but wanted reassurance.

“Your Majesty has always been brilliant.” Chief Cao was clear.

“The process in which Great Tang was built...” The Emperor seemed to be recalling the past. “I cannot let down the ministers that sacrificed their lives to build and pave the way for Great Tang. I cannot let down the citizens that have finally gone through the struggles to have a peaceful life even more. In order to protect myself, I had to fight brutally with my brothers. I had no choice but to kill one of my own sons as well. This is enough! The Li blood cannot flow because of this throne anymore. I hope that they will be able to understand this difficult arrangement of mine and not think that I am favouring this person or that. I hope to protect the previous relationship of the entire royal family.”

Chief Cao did not say anything. He knew when he should keep quiet.

Soon, Concubine Yan and Yu He entered the palace. They look amicable.

“Your Majesty, is there something you require from me?”

The Emperor’s gaze flitted across Concubine Yan and Yu He’s face, looking like he wanted to figure something out. “Concubine Yan, Concubine Xi told me that Yu He is Emperor Yang of Sui’s Prince Yang Lian.”

Concubine Yan was shocked and immediately kneeled. Yu He kneeled as well.

Concubine Yan frowned, “This...is complete nonsense. I neglected Concubine Xi in the harem and I don’t blame her for resenting me. However, she cannot make up these kinds of horrifying rumours. How can she simply say someone is Emperor Yang’s prince? Your Majesty, please summon Concubine Xi over. I am willing to talk it out with her directly. If she cannot produce solid evidence, Your Majesty has to stand up for me.”

The Emperor’s expression did not change. “The only evidence that Concubine Xi could say was that she once saw that Yang Lian’s hand

had a huge scar from a lightning strike. As for this point, I have already summoned Yu He to check. Yu He's scar is from a scald and not a lightning scar. However--" He finally got to the main point. "I am still not rest assured." *In the big picture, the truth was never important.*

Being well-versed in things like this, Concubine Yan immediately noticed things were not right.

The Emperor spoke warmly, "I have known you for over ten years. No matter how they spoke about your identity as the Sui Dynasty's princess, I always wished that you could safely accompany me till I am old."

Concubine Yan was confused. "Yes...Your Majesty, I am willing to follow you for life."

"Hence, I will personally help you get rid of any suspicious person by your side." The Emperor's expression suddenly turned serious. "Guards!"

The internal attendants delivered a cup of wine and presented it to Yu He. Concubine Yan was shocked.

The Emperor spoke coldly, "Repeated rumour becomes a fact and public opinion is enough to obscure the truth. More so in the palace. Since there is a rumour about Yu He being Emperor Yang's prince, regardless of whether it is the truth, there is no place left for you. Concubine Yan is Emperor Yang's daughter and she has already suffered. With you serving her, it will just add more trouble. Drink this cup of wine as your loyalty to Concubine Yan."

Concubine Yan knelted in front of the Emperor. "Your Majesty! Yu He has served me for so many years but has never made a mistake. Please be magnanimous, Your Majesty!"

"Concubine Yan, I am doing this for your sake. As long as Yu He dies, the rumours will disappear and you won't have to suffer the indignance. I will treat you well in the future and always protect you." The Emperor was stern. "Yu He, what are you waiting for?"

Yu He slowly picked up the cup of wine. “Thank you, Your Majesty.” He turned to look at Concubine Yan. “Take care, Your Highness, I will be going first!”

Concubine Yan suddenly crawled up and rushed to knock over the wine. She hugged Yu He and bawled, “I don’t agree to this! I will never agree!”

The Emperor was not surprised. After all, the rumour that Yu He was a prince of the previous dynasty could not have been made out of nothing. Moreover, to Concubine Xi, who has lost her son, she would not stand to gain anything from hurting Concubine Yan. The Emperor knew that this was most likely not a lie.

“In this world, it is not sworn kinship that is easiest to bring to light. It is true flesh and blood. Concubine Yan, you have accompanied me for so long, have you never forgotten the already lost Sui Dynasty?” His heart turned cold. He suddenly thought of the favour that he had shown her, other than the title of Empress, she had everything equivalent to the Empress.

Concubine Yan placed everything at stake and looked straight at the Emperor. “If Great Tang is destroyed, would you forget Great Tang? Would you forget the Great Tang royal blood that flows in you?”

“But you are my concubine, you are a mother of my prince! All these years, I have...treated you...” The Emperor suddenly grabbed his chest, his face filled with pain.

Concubine Yan was shocked and did not know how to react.

The Emperor looked at the cup of tea on his table before looking at Chief Cao in disbelief.

Chief Cao was calm and composed. “His Majesty’s arthritis has blown up again. It seems like it is more serious this time. I am afraid that it would be difficult for him to wake up.”

“Cao Yangde, I have never treated you poorly, you...you...” The Emperor swiped the tea cup but Chief Cao nimbly caught it.

“Your Majesty has treated me well. However, the one that I am

indebted to is the emperor of the previous dynasty. On Emperor Yang's travels, he saved me as I was about to starve to death. Although it was a casual instruction for him, he saved my life and I was able to enter the palace. I had food to eat and clothes to wear. I could even study along with the other internal attendants. To me, this was kindness that gave me a new lease of life. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to repay him before he was killed. When Chang'an was invaded, I was just a small internal attendant. Hence, I was able to stay in the palace to continue serving. However, I have always wished for my benefactor's children and grandchildren to take over the palace once again and restore it to its former glory. Today, it is finally time." Chief Cao remained polite, "Your Majesty, you should rest."

"Great Tang is supported by heaven, the violent Sui...dream on..." The Emperor's head tilted as he fell to the side of his throne, unmoving.

Ganlou Palace fell silent. All of sudden, there was a clatter. The internal attendant that had served the poison wine to Yu He was still around. He took a few steps back in fright. He turned, wanting to escape. Concubine Yan was faster than him and Yu He had a murderous intent. The both of them surrounded the internal attendant. One of them covered his mouth while the other strangled him. Very soon, the internal attendant stopped breathing.

It was only then that Concubine Yan felt the fear and fell to the ground. She looked at the motionless Emperor.

Chief Cao walked up to help her. "Your Highness, His Majesty had already decided to kill Yu He. However, he did this out of love for you and did not want things to spread and ruin Your Highness' name. That is why other than us today, the other internal attendants and guards were instructed to stay far away. This is Your Highness' blessing and Great Sui's fate."

Concubine Yan's voice trembled, "Is...he dead?"

Chief Cao smiled, "He is still alive. He is just on the brink of death."

Yu He spoke, "Your Highness, things didn't turn out as we expected

and it is too late to be scared. We can only adapt.”

Concubine Yan took a deep breath as her eyes turned sharp. She slowly walked to the Emperor’s side, touching his face. Sorrow and determination fought in her eyes.

Chief Cao and Yu He hid the internal attendant’s body.

“Your Majesty, Your Majesty...” Concubine Yan suddenly raised her voice, “Men! His Majesty has fainted from his arthritis attack! Men!”

She loved him but had to choose between love or her country.

Oh no...! And omg, the drama did not even include this. It's very confusing to watch after episode 46. -_-” I think they were forced to cut down from 69 episodes to 55, so it's super confusing. I hope some of you guys came from the drama! :P

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The Emperor suddenly fell seriously ill and everyone in the harem was worried. All the concubines wanted to visit him. However, Concubine Yan naturally did not allow them to meet the Emperor. She instructed the internal attendants to prevent anyone from entering. However, not everyone listened obediently. A newly promoted concubine had just received the Emperor's favour and she had a huge character. She made noise about wanting to see the Emperor and raged at the internal attendants. Concubine Yan was notified.

Concubine Yan walked out and got everyone to leave in a few sentences. Li Baolin had always had a clear view and was adaptable to things. She was the last one to go and the first one to leave. She was about to hurry back to her Huayin Palace when she heard Concubine Yan ask the concubine to stay behind. Similar to others, she stopped to watch the show.

Concubine Yan ordered for the new concubine to be slapped forty times. The concubine got slapped so hard that she even lost a few teeth. It was a pitiful sight.

Everyone was panic-stricken.

Concubine Yan, however, smiled and said that she has always been kind. But now that the Emperor has handed the harem over to her to

manage, she had to be accountable to the Emperor. She was going to control all those that did not follow the rules and hoped that everyone would be able to understand and help her out. She made it sound good but she was actually even more cruel than the Empress. Although the concubine's status was low, she was still the Emperor's woman. Even though the late Empress was strict, she would never easily punish people.

Everyone forced a smile and only after Concubine Yan left did everyone dare to leave.

Li Baolin had vaguely heard from others that Concubine Yan was extremely scary when she was fierce and she seemed like an entirely different person from before. However, she did not think that Concubine Yan was like a different person. Most likely, Concubine Yan had suppressed and hid her real personality deeply and now she could finally show her true self.

When Li Baolin returned to Huayin Palace, Guihua, who had gone to find out more, returned as well. Guihua told her astonishing and hair-raising news -- Concubine Xi was dead!

The people from the Internal Attendant Department said that she had committed suicide. However, no matter how Li Baolin thought about it, something was not right. During morning court today, the Emperor had been perfectly fine. Guihua found out that Concubine Xi had gone to meet the Emperor thereafter. Now, the Emperor was extremely ill while Concubine Xi was dead. Li Baolin also heard that when the Emperor's sickness acted up, Concubine Yan was present.

Li Baolin could not help the cold shiver that went down her spine. She asked Guihua to find someone she trusted to send a verbal message to the Duke Lu Residence. Fu Rou had to stay in Daci'en Temple no matter what. She could not return to the palace.

Prince Zhou rushed back to the palace to visit his unconscious Imperial Father. When he heard that his mother had been present, he could not help but become suspicious. When he arrived at his mother's palace, he saw that the door was tightly shut and there were

people guarding the door. He changed his mind and snuck beneath a side window.

“We have to give it to the Emperor, he always plans far ahead. Before he summoned me and Yu He to Ganlou Palace, he had already written several secret imperial decrees to make changes to the imperial guards around Chang’an. He made Prince Zhou powerless. All that is left is for Prince Qin to return from Daci’en Temple and he will be crowned as the Crown Prince. Prince Zhou will then have no choice but to leave Chang’an and return to his feudal land.”

“Amongst the imperial decrees, there is one for the governor of Zhou Land. As soon as Prince Zhou returns to his feudal land, he would take away all military and executive power from Prince Zhou. Prince Zhou is to become a rich but helpless noble.”

“Thankfully, Chief Cao withheld these secret imperial decrees. If not, there would be trouble. “

Prince Zhou never expected that Chief Cao, whom his Imperial Father trusted greatly, would actually help his mother.

“This time, it is all thanks to Chief Cao that we were able to avert disaster.” Concubine Yan’s voice was full of gratitude.

“The Emperor of Great Sui was my benefactor. All these years that I have been in the palace, I worked hard to serve in the day but at night, I secretly mourn towards heaven. I always thought that my wish was just like a fleeting cloud. Heaven has eyes. I am actually able to see the day where Great Sui has hopes of being restored.”
Although his body was physically here, his heart was elsewhere.

“Chief Cao, why didn’t you say earlier that you are loyal to Great Sui? The situation at Ganlou Palace scared me to death.” Yu He felt extremely lucky.

“Who would dare to say something like that so casually? A single wrong sentence would cause me to lose my life. When both Prince Han and the Crown Prince suffered badly and Prince Qin almost died at Fu An Palace, I realised that something was amiss. I guessed that there were people on the same side as me in the palace. The biggest

possibility was Your Highness, who shares the same bloodline as Great Sui's Emperor. However, I did not dare to act rashly. But I have already helped Chief Yu greatly when it came to inserting your own people in the Internal Attendant Department. After all, I am not a muddled fool. How could I have let you continuously bring people into the Internal Attendant Department?"

"Who said that Great Sui has no one's hearts? This is Great Sui's heart." Concubine Yan could not help but sigh.

Prince Zhou could not stand to listen anymore as he took big strides through the main entrance. The internal attendants were hesitant whether to stop him and he took the chance to push open the door.

Chief Cao and Yu He automatically left and closed the door behind them.

Prince Zhou looked at his mother, who was drinking tea, like he was staring at a stranger. "For the kingdom and for the throne, you can even hurt your own husband. How can you be so brutal as to use any means to achieve your goals?"

Concubine Yan replied, "That's right. For Great Sui's kingdom and for Great Sui's bloodline to retake the throne, I can do anything. I can be heartless. But I swear on my name and to our ancestors that I have never thought of hurting the Emperor. He is your father and my husband. He is the person I have shared a pillow with for over ten years. Did you think that your mother is a beast with no ounce of human emotions? My heart felt like it was being cut up when I saw him struggling to breathe!"

"Weren't you the one that instructed Chief Cao?" She did not look like she was lying.

"I only recently found out about the relationship between Chief Cao and my Imperial Father. However, if not for his quick actions, you would have been chased out of Chang'an by your Imperial Father."

At this point, there was no need to hide things from her son anymore.

Prince Zhou sighed, "Mother, even if Imperial Father did not intend

to give me the throne, he adores me more than anyone else. If the price to pay to rule the world is to become a murderer that kills his own father, I would rather have nothing.”

Concubine Yan was stubborn. “Isn’t the precedence right in front of you? In the Xuanwu gate coup, your Imperial Father was also not the ideal inheritor to your Imperial Grandfather. However, your Imperial Father became the Emperor in the end and made your Imperial Grandfather the Grand Emperor. Your Imperial Grandfather was still able to live in splendor into his old age and be with his children and grandchildren. Moreover, Prince Qin is not his oldest son. Ge’er, you have the right to fight. Why do you have to endure and give in to others to take the throne?”

Prince Zhou finally wavered. He understood his mother’s last sentence clearly. If he were to always give in, only death awaited him. Look at the Crown Prince and Prince Han. Neither of them looked at him as a brother. He was afraid that Prince Qin may very well share the same sentiments.

Aaaiii.

Court Lady

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The mountain breeze caressed her face. The horrifying ambush seemed like a long time ago. Fu Rou stood at the monastery and looked down. She saw the palace servants loading their luggage onto the carriage as the guards got ready to leave.

The thing that was edged most deeply into her mind was how energetic Sheng Chumu's troop of a hundred men were. They were spread out in groups of threes but would occasionally make a strange hand signal to communicate with each other. In their small groups of threes, they protected a large perimeter, making it feel extremely well secured.

A while back, Prince Qin and the rest were all safe when Fu Rou found them. Sheng Chumu had been sent by the Emperor to secretly guard them. That was how they were able to neutralise the danger quickly.

With the addition of the hundred soldiers, Linghu Deguan was able to create an impenetrable defence. Hence, Fu Rou was able to relax and enjoy the mountain breeze.

Sheng Chumu walked to Fu Rou's side. He did not say anything and simply accompanied her.

"General Sheng." Fu Rou broke the silence. "Do you need something?"

“Court Lady Fu.” Sheng Chumu followed her gaze and looked down. The group was in plain sight. “Nothing. Just looking from up here to see if any of them are slacking. What are you looking at?”

“The country.” Fu Rou could not say that she was looking at his troops as well. “The tranquil mountains, gentle breeze and peace. Great Tang is so beautiful.”

Sheng Chumu’s gaze shifted to Fu Rou’s side profile. “The ladies of Great Tang are also very beautiful.”

Fu Rou turned around. “But the generals of Great Tang...”

“What?” Sheng Chumu’s ears were so upright they almost formed two pointy edges. “What about Great Tang’s generals?”

Fu Rou smiled as she walked down the steps. “No comments.”

Sheng Chumu shouted behind Fu Rou, “What about Great Tang’s generals? Great Tang’s generals are mighty, courageous and heroic. Even if they are occasionally jealous, they are still better looking than anyone else!”

This was not a flowery speech. It was one hundred percent fact. However, the lady did not turn back and appeared unfazed.

It was evening. Because Sheng Chumu was persistent on changing their route back, there was no inn or relay station available. They could only set up a simple tent. Prince Qin thought that this was interesting. He was particularly impressed when Sheng Chumu went to hunt and all his shots were on target.

However, Xiao Lu was bored to death. “Are you done? Isn’t it just shooting a few birds? All military generals know how to ride and shoot. It is not like it is some impressive skill.”

Prince Qin argued, “Not just two! He shot tens of arrows and none missed! Look, one of his arrows just shot two! Incredible!”

Xiao Lu looked for someone that could speak well. “Court Lady Fu,

His Highness is making a big fuss. Aren't you going to discipline him?"

Fu Rou was captivated by Sheng Chumu as well and did not pay attention to her. Xiao Lu found it strange. "Court Lady Fu, why are you also staring at General Sheng?"

Fu Rou reacted, "Huh...? I just think that his archery skills are good but he likes to flaunt too much. He is always so proud and thinks he is amazing. It is annoying." *God, please forgive her for betraying her own heart.*

Prince Qin froze. "Tutor, so you dislike General Sheng?" He immediately stopped looking at Sheng Chumu and spoke in a bootlicking tone, "Since Teacher does not like him, then I will dislike him too. When I return to Chang'an, I will complain to Imperial father and say that he did not do a good job in protecting us and only concentrated on hunting."

Fu Rou shouted, "No!"

Prince Qin was startled. "Why not?"

Fu Rou was serious. "Flaunting is just a small issue. No one is perfect. Who does not have a few bad habits? General Sheng is loyal, brave and smart. He is an indomitable man and a valuable talent to Great Tang. Your Highness has to treasure and use him. You can't be prejudiced towards him just because of a small harmless bad habit."

Prince Qin looked behind Fu Rou and winked playfully. "General Sheng, Teacher really admires you."

Fu Rou quickly turned back to look and realised that Sheng Chumu had unknowingly been standing behind her. His smile was so wide, it looked like it was about to tear.

Fu Rou was extremely awkward and was momentarily speechless.

Sheng Chumu stopped smiling. "I am here to present the hunt to Your Highness."

Prince Qin was always filled with energy. "Thank you. Xiao Lu."

Xiao Lu stepped up to take the bird from Sheng Chumu. Prince Qin moved beside Xiao Lu and spoke excitedly, "Look, these two birds were shot down with the same arrow."

"I can't be bothered with how many arrows were used to shoot them. How do we eat this?"

"You haven't tried barbecuing food before? I haven't tried it either." Prince Qin pulled Xiao Lu away. "Tonight is going to be fun."

Sheng Chumu mumbled, "Loyal, brave and smart. He is an indomitable man and a valuable talent to Great Tang. You summarised my good points pretty well. However, without my elegance, confidence..."

A rider neared them. Fu Rou saw him first and became nervous. "Who is that?"

Sheng Chumu frowned as his hand went to his sword hilt. He rushed forward and whistled at the same time. Ye Qiulang, Zong Jianxiu and the group immediately jumped up and stepped forward to block the incoming person. It was clear that they were well-trained.

The man got off in a disheveled manner and shouted, "I am from the Duke Lu Residence!"

Sheng Chumu stepped forward. "Junhui, why are you here?"

Junhui pushed Ye Qiulang and Zong Jianxiu away as he lowered his voice, "Young Master, it is good to see you. However, I am actually here to meet Court Lady Fu."

Sheng Chumu frowned and turned around. He saw that Fu Rou had moved to stand beside Prince Qin and she looked to be on high alert. Alas, they were thinking the same thing and both felt something was wrong.

In the distance, the bonfire had been lit. Prince Qin and Xiao Lu had begun roasting the catch. It looked pretty good and the meat was overflowing with flavour.

Fu Rou and Sheng Chumu sat on the other side as they listened to

Junhui tell them about the situation in the palace. He also told Fu Rou that Li Baolin had warned her not to return. Fu Rou was glad that she had such a good sister like Li Baolin. While everyone was panicking in the palace, Li Baolin took the risk to send her a warning.

The Emperor was ill, and Concubine Xi had committed suicide. Although the move to assassinate Prince Qin failed, Concubine Yan was in charge of the Six Offices and Prince Zhou was ruling. Going back would be like a lamb entering a tiger's mouth. However, Fu Rou had to go back. She must return!

Sheng Chumu gave Junhui a look and Junhui took the initiative to leave.

Fu Rou said, "I know what you want to say."

Sheng Chumu replied, "I know what you want to do but I cannot allow you to."

Fu Rou fell silent. "Because it is too dangerous?"

Sheng Chumu shook his head. "Because I like you and care about you. I can't let you put your life at risk just for your so-called duty."

"So are we going to defect once again? We once hid and gave up on our country because we longed to be together and enjoy the sweetness of our relationship. But was that feeling sweet? Duty is duty. Chumu, you and I cannot run from it because you are not someone like that and neither am I."

"Don't try to convince me with flowery words!" Sheng Chumu's voice fell, "You risk your life to enter the palace to meet the Emperor and Empress' expectations. You won't let Great Tang down and you would be at peace. However, I would always be worried for you. What about me? If you even care a little about me, you cannot do this to me."

"You once did that to me as well." Fu Rou was as calm as still water. "When you fought in Anxi Canyon, when you went to the borders, when you went to attack Qizhou. When did you not put your life on

the line? Don't you care about me?"

"Of course I care!" *It was without a doubt.*

"But you still chose the most dangerous path." Fu Rou smiled and shook her head. "If you cared even a little about me, you would not always put your life on the line and make me worried."

Sheng Chumu argued back, "But I am a general who has to lead the troops. If I leave my soldiers behind and run by myself, what would I become?"

Fu Rou suddenly hugged Sheng Chumu. "That's great. This is why I like you. You are righteous. Even if I have to worry all the time, I still like you. And I am also not someone that can leave my responsibilities behind and run by myself. You and I are both citizens of Great Tang. For Great Tang, we will not run this time."

Sheng Chumu's heart pounded non-stop. "Okay, let's not run! But you are not allowed to ignore me!"

Fu Rou pushed him away and found it funny. "Who is the one ignoring who?"

Finally, their lover's quarrel ended with a smile.

Wei Song came to find Concubine Yan, wanting to ask for permission to leave the palace. However, Concubine Yan said that there had been a theft in the palace and the security had been increased. No one could leave even if they had the Leaving Palace Tablet.

Yu He mocked, "Fu An Palace has been burnt to ashes. As the head of Fu An Palace, shouldn't you go and see how to clean up the remnants of Fu An Palace? Her Highness is increasing the Six Offices' discipline and the security of the palace has been increased. Why are you even requesting to leave the palace?"

Wei Song knew the human relations in the palace best and knew that something was wrong. "I will take my leave."

"There is something I want to ask you." Concubine Yan did not let him leave. "I heard that an internal attendant from Fu An Palace called Zhi He has died?"

Wei Song answered carefully, "Yes. On that night when Fu An Palace was on fire, Zhi He was burnt to death."

Yu He and Concubine Yan echoed each other, "When Zhi He was found, there were chains on his body. Things might not be so simple."

Wei Song was calm. "Zhi He stole something from Fu An Palace and got caught. He was chained up because we were afraid that he would escape."

Yu He snorted, "He is already dead. Is he a thief just because you call him one?"

When Wei Song heard this, he cursed in his heart. They were trying to accuse him. "With regard to Zhi He's theft, we informed Court Lady Fu at that time. The Six Offices has a record. I did not make this up."

Concubine Yan replied, "If there is a theft in the palace, they should be sent to the Managerial Department for questioning. Instead, you locked him up and dealt your own punishment."

Wei Song replied, "I would not dare. I reported this to Imperial Concubine Wang and she said that this was a small matter and there was no need to bring it up. Fu An Palace could deal with it by ourselves. I was just acting according to Imperial Concubine Wang's instructions."

Concubine Yan chuckled coldly, "Do you have witnesses?"

Wei Song froze. "When...I reported this, only Imperial Concubine Wang was around." *Because their motive for catching him was not simple so no one else could be around.*

Yu He laughed wickedly, "Imperial Concubine Wang has already passed on. That means you don't have witnesses?"

Wei Song's breath hitched. "You..."

Concubine Yan's eyes showed no tolerance. "Wei Song, you were taught by the Empress for so many years yet you actually personally punished Zhi He. How could you live up to the Empress in heaven? You shall be caned a hundred times for giving out your own punishment. Men, take him away!"

Wei Song was restrained. "Ridiculous!"

Yu He shouted, "Drag him out. Cane him a hundred times."

"Wait." Concubine Yan added, "Wei Song is someone that has served the Empress for many years. Now that he is being punished, it cannot be left unknown. Call everyone over and tell them the reason why he is being punished. In the future, no one can complain that I am unreasonable."

It's cute how Prince Qin winked at Chumu. He already knows how to help a bro! LOLOL

And uh oh. They are returning back to the palace. Dun dun dun...

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Fu Rou returned to the palace. In front of the palace guards, she personally carried Prince Qin, who was sleeping soundly, and brought him to his palace. When she ensured Prince Qin was settled down, she wanted to return to the Six Offices to handle some matters. However, when she walked past the Imperial Garden, she saw a lot of people looking in the same direction. She found out that Concubine Yan wanted to punish Wei Song and she rushed to Concubine Yan's palace.

When Fu Rou arrived in the main courtyard, she saw Concubine Yan sitting in front of the palace door. A group of palace personnel surrounded her like they were revering her. Down the stairs, there were two lines of concubines and female officials. They all looked distressed. Although it has not been long since Fu Rou entered the palace, she had once been puzzled as to why Empress Zhangsun was so strict. However, as she saw Concubine Yan bossing everyone around, not caring about what was right and wrong, she finally understood Empress Zhangsun's benevolence.

Yu He peered down from above haughtily. "Wei Song had personally punished internal attendant Zhi He, causing Zhi He to be unable to escape when Fu An Palace caught on fire and he was burnt alive. Concubine Yan will be punishing Wei Song with a hundred strokes of the cane according to palace rules. This punishment will be carried out in front of everybody."

Wei Song was furious and shouted, “You want to condemn me, so you are making up a story!”

Concubine Yan ignored him. “There is a mix of good and bad people in the Six Offices and it should have been settled a long time ago. Today, I have invited my various sisters to be witnesses for me. Although Zhi He was wrong, Wei Song should not have carried out the punishment on his own.” She turned to look at Supervisor He. “Supervisor He, am I right?”

Supervisor He flattered her. “Your Highness is right. If anyone makes a mistake in the palace, they should be sent to the office to be dealt with. By locking him up, it means that they are punishing them according to what they deem fit. Wei Song should be punished.”

Concubine Yan looked around. “I am not someone that makes decisions without consulting others. If anyone has anything to say, please speak freely.”

“Your Highness.” Fu Rou walked up and was about to speak her mind.

Concubine Yan had already received the news. “Court Lady Fu, you have just returned and you are already joining in. Aren’t you tired?”

Fu Rou’s expression did not change. “I am in charge of the Six Offices and ensuring that people keep to the palace rules is part of my duties. Your Highness, please do not rush to punish anyone. According to the palace rules, before someone is punished, there is still one thing you have to do.”

Concubine Yan asked, “What?”

“Asking the accused.” Fu Rou asked Wei Song, “Do you admit to your crime?”

Wei Song spoke loudly, “I am the chief of Fu An Palace and I was ordered by Imperial Concubine Wang to deal with the thief. I did not do anything wrong. I do not plead guilty!”

Fu Rou said, “Since Wei Song said that he was acting on orders and Imperial Concubine Wang has passed on, there is no way to prove it.

Your Highness should understand that there are things amiss with this. Since there are things that are amiss, the punishment should be withheld.”

“Court Lady Fu, you do not make sense.” Supervisor He was trying to get on Concubine Yan’s good side. “Since there are things amiss, nobles should make the decision. Amongst everyone, Her Highness has the highest status. Naturally, we would look to Her Highness to make the decision.”

“Her Highness does indeed have the power to make the decision.” Fu Rou’s tone changed. “However, I would like to remind Your Highness that everyone’s watching to see whether your decision is fair and kind. Do think twice.”

Concubine Yan looked fierce. “I wanted to be kind. However, I cannot tolerate these people who dare to challenge the system. If I let them go this time, it will be a disaster in the future. I can only punish each one I catch severely. Wei Song took the liberty to deliver his own punishment and should be punished. Now, in order to escape the punishment, he is arguing and pushing the blame on Imperial Concubine Wang. To blame the soul of the deceased is yet another crime. With two crimes, he should be punished. His punishment shall now be changed to three hundred strokes of the cane.”

All the noble ladies were startled and started muttering amongst themselves.

Li Baolin murmured to herself, “I told you not to come but you refuse to listen to me. Now you are even arguing with Concubine Yan. Aiya, this is really making me so anxious.”

Fu Rou’s face fell. “Your Highness, you are using someone’s life to demonstrate your power.”

Concubine Yan was feeling happier and happier. “I manage the harem and I have the power. I made the decision to punish him. As a female official, what can you do? You are not that capable yet.” She had already lost out to Fu Rou when it came to talking. Today, they were setting a new score; a pity that Wei Song was the scapegoat.

Yu He took the opportunity to shout, "Begin!"

The internal attendants held heavy rods as they raised it up high. They prepared to punish Wei Song. Fu Rou yelled, "Wait!"

Concubine Yan became fierce. "Court Lady Fu, if you continue to obstruct, I will punish you for being impolite."

Fu Rou did not relent. "Although Your Highness is determined to punish Wei Song, heaven is kind and kindness comes from above. "

Concubine Yan narrowed her eyes. "I have already made up my mind and will not show kindness to Wei Song!"

Fu Rou shook his head. "Your Highness has misunderstood. I was not referring to you when I said that kindness comes from above. I was referring to Empress Wende. Her Majesty is benevolent and will forgive Wei Song."

Concubine Yan sneered, "Wei Song brought up the late Imperial Concubine Wang, now you are talking about the late Empress Wende. Do you have problems hearing and fail to understand me? To make an excuse using the dead and ruining their name is a crime! Although you are the head of the Six Offices, you have to be punished when you commit a mistake too. Yu He."

Yu He respectfully replied, "Here."

Concubine Yan was thinking how she could finally vent her anger. "Take her down with Wei Song. She shall be punished with two hundred strokes of the cane in order to appease Empress Wende's soul."

Yu He also pretended to be almighty. "Men, take down Court Lady Fu!"

Fu Rou was calm and confident as she took out a handkerchief from her chest pocket and lifted it. "I have Empress Wende's personal order. Who dares to be impolite?"

Everyone was stunned.

Li Baolin hid right in the back. She changed her voice to urge, "Receiving Her Majesty's personal order."

Immediately, there was a flurry as everyone kneeled on the ground. In front of so many people, Concubine Yan could not disobey the rules as well. She had no choice but to let Yu He support her to a kneel. "Receiving Her Majesty's personal order."

Fu Rou spoke, "This was written personally by Empress Wende and there is a record in Lizheng Palace. You can check to verify. Her Majesty is kind and benevolent. She wrote the word pardon on this to pardon one person from a crime. Wei Song."

Wei Song was excited. "Here!"

Fu Rou handed the handkerchief over. "This is Her Majesty's pardon for you."

"Thank you, Her Majesty!" Wei Song kowtowed as he took the handkerchief. "Her Majesty is benevolent. The Six Offices will remember this deeply!"

Everyone spoke simultaneously, "Her Majesty is benevolent. The Six Offices will remember this deeply!"

Concubine Yan was so angry, her whole body trembled with rage. However, she could not show it now. *Wait! Just wait! When her son becomes the Emperor, whoever that has gone against her will pay!*

When Fu Rou returned to the Six Offices, she gathered all the female officials. She deliberately called for Supervisor He.

"Remove He Linghua's female official uniform." This Supervisor He has been influenced by all sorts of bad things. *She does not operate fairly and caused the Managerial Department to be a mess. Today, she will no longer tolerate it.*

Palace maids stepped forward to remove Supervisor He's uniform.

Supervisor He glared at her, "Court Lady Fu, I was only answering

truthfully in front of Concubine Yan today. I did not break any rules. What right do you have to remove me? You are doing this out of a personal grudge!”

“I took away your position not because you attempted to flatter Concubine Yan today. It is for other things.” Fu Rou looked behind Supervisor He. “Superior Xu.”

Superior Xu has always been Supervisor He’s right-hand woman. However, Fu Rou could tell that she was different from Supervisor He. There was a hint of suppressed anger in Superior Xu’s eyes.

Superior Xu stepped up and handed a book of accounts to Fu Rou. “He Linghua made use of her position as supervisor to receive bribes. When a female official is to be punished, they just need to bribe her and they would not need to be punished. Those that were not willing to flatter her would be hit even if they did nothing wrong. It is recorded clearly in this book.”

Supervisor He was flustered. “Xu Sanming, to think I treated you like my own sister! You traitor, you will suffer!”

Fu Rou was cold. “The person who takes bribes and bends the law will suffer. Remove her official uniform and lock her up.”

Supervisor He was dragged away.

Superior Xu was uneasy. “Under the pressure of my senior, I have also done many wrong deeds. I do not dare to continue holding the position of superior. Please let me stay in the Lateral Courts as a normal female official.”

Fu Rou replied, “There is nothing better than understanding one’s mistakes and being willing to change. I have seen your work. You have been a superior for five years and the things that you do are still considered fair. The Managerial Department rectifies the entire atmosphere in the palace and cannot be looked down on. You have to be more cautious and disciplined in the future. You must not repeat the disaster that happened with the previous supervisor, He Linghua.”

Superior Zheng was in slight disbelief. “Previous? Court Lady Fu, do you mean...”

Rites Official Wu smiled, “Congratulations, Supervisor Xu.”

Superior Xu was delighted and bowed deeply. “Thank you, Court Lady Fu! In the future, I will set an example with myself and correct the atmosphere in the palace.”

Fu Rou accepted with a smile. Concubine Yan was now holding all the power. She did not know how long she could hold on for. However, for as long as she is in this position, she would handle things impartially and not give up on righteousness.

Empress Zhangsun and Empress Wende is the same person. I don't know why they have so many names/titles. It's soooooooooo confusing. -_-"

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In Concubine Yan's palace, Concubine Yan had smashed things all over the place.

All these years, she had been tolerating and even hid her true self. Only heaven knew how difficult it had been to hide. She was born as a princess and was favoured by her father. *What a glorious bloodline.* However, just because the royal family fell, she could only marry the current Emperor and was not even his main wife. Amongst others, she was just a concubine. Even after she gained the Emperor's love, she was always suppressed by Empress Zhangsun. From her position to her son's position, Empress Zhangsun did not relent as she stepped all over her and her son.

She knew very clearly that she just needed to capture the Emperor's heart in order to bring victory to her and her son. Hence, she always put on a smiling face in front of everyone. Whoever mentioned her would always think of her as a kind leader. She hardly said anything harsh even to the people serving her. She was afraid of damaging her reputation and losing the Emperor's heart. She was supposed to be well-loved and hold a position with thousands of people revering her. She was supposed to be able to say what she wants, do what she wants and recklessly speak her mind. She had always been proud. Now, she had gotten rid of the Empress, the Crown Prince and Prince Han. However, she was still losing out to a tiny female official. It caused her true arrogant self to explode. She no longer had to

pretend.

Chief Cao waited until Concubine Yan had simmered before he calmly persuaded her. “Your Highness does not need to be angry. As long as we control the bigger picture and Prince Zhou smoothly ascends the throne, you will easily be able to dictate if that female official dies.”

Concubine Yan thought about it and let out a slow breath as she sat down. “How is the reaction of the Imperial Guards to Ge’er’s order?”

Chief Cao replied, “Everyone is pretty okay and is willing to listen using either punishments or rewards. Linghu Deguan and Sheng Chumu are the only stubborn ones who refuse to listen to anyone aside from the Emperor himself. They are not budging even after Prince Zhou’s order.”

Concubine Yan snorted, “Sheng Chumu is just a general of a hundred soldiers. He has so little men and is not a big deal.”

“Yes. However, Linghu Deguan is a great general of the Imperial Guards. If he remains reluctant, I am afraid that there will be variables.”

“Then hurry up and rope in the rest to isolate Linghu Deguan. When that happens, he will not be able to do anything.”

Chief Cao was about to acknowledge when Yu He entered.

“Your Highness, this is bad. Prince Qin is gone.”

Concubine Yan looked stern.

Yu He spoke, “I acted according to the plan and arranged for someone to add something into Prince Qin’s food. However, when that internal attendant went to deliver the food, there was no one in the room.” What they added was not a poison that would kill him instantly but one that will make him lose his wits. Eating it for eight to ten days straight would turn him into a fool. In that manner, even without concrete evidence, a fool would not be able to inherit the throne.

“Did he not return to the palace or did he go missing after returning? Is he still in the palace?” Concubine Yan became anxious. *For every day that Prince Qin remains well, it would make it more difficult for Prince Zhou to take the throne.*

Yu He had already investigated. “The guards as well as the people in Prince Qin’s palace all saw Court Lady Fu carry him back into his palace. He should be in the royal palace.”

Chief Cao added, “Your Highness, do not be anxious. Perhaps Prince Qin just wants to play and has run out by himself. He has always been like this. He has a child’s temperament.”

Concubine Yan was thinking deeper. “Could it be that Fu Rou is playing tricks? Did they clearly see that the person she was carrying was Prince Qin?”

Yu He stuttered, “This...they had been ambushed before the news of the Emperor falling ill had spread through Chang’an. They would have been rushing back to report to the Emperor and would not have time to prepare. However, there is a possibility that Wei Song had alerted Fu Rou and she had hidden Prince Qin.”

Concubine Yan nodded. “As long as he is in the palace, there is nothing to be afraid of. Find him! Even if you have to dig up the ground, you have to find Prince Qin!”

On this night, there was chaos as the internal attendants searched the entire palace upside down.

At this time, there were villains who intentionally created trouble and made things difficult for the female officials from the Six Offices. Thankfully, Fu Rou and Sheng Chumu were prepared. They invited Princess Xinnan to calm the masses while they also activated the hundred soldiers to monitor the situation. Hence, although it was a daunting experience, no one suffered.

Fu Rou did not sleep the entire night as she walked out of her office and watched the colour of dawn. The female officials under her came

to report that the search had ended. Although there was some friction, nothing major happened and everyone was safe.

Fu Rou was relieved as she walked to Concubine Yan's palace. This was the good thing about power. Even if there was a limit and there was a possibility that her opponent controlled the entire situation, it was good that it has yet to happen. She could make use of this time and that was good enough.

Concubine Yan did not hide her disgust at Fu Rou. "Court Lady Fu, you look so haggard. Did you not sleep well last night?"

Fu Rou did not flatter. "Your Highness, likewise."

Concubine Yan narrowed her eyes dangerously. "Prince Qin went with you to Daci'en Temple and you carried him back to his palace when you returned. This means that only you know best if Prince Qin had returned to the palace or not."

Fu Rou was calm. "Everyone was present. Your Highness can go ahead and ask them, I have nothing to hide."

Concubine Yan did not care about right and wrong and only relied on power to suppress others. When it came to dealing with someone treacherous, Fu Rou did not mind playing games and could lie without blinking.

Concubine Yan could not sense anything and criticised her. "We searched the palace the entire night, yet Prince Qin is nowhere to be found. Court Lady Fu, do you have nothing else to say?"

Fu Rou was frank. "I do. When Your Highness searched the entire palace last night, you missed out on one place."

Concubine Yan raised her brows. "Where?"

Fu Rou spoke, "Ganlou Palace."

Concubine Yan immediately felt guilty. "Impudent."

Fu Rou was fearless. "His Majesty has been recuperating in the palace. Other than the people Chief Cao arranged to take care of the

Emperor and the two imperial physicians you chose, no one is allowed to see the Emperor.”

Concubine Yan’s eyes were sharp. “That is because the Emperor needs to rest.”

“Prince Qin is a filial child and he will be thinking of the Emperor. Perhaps he has snuck into Ganlou Palace to meet the Emperor.” Fu Rou remained composed. “Your Highness, please allow me to enter Ganlou Palace to find Prince Qin.”

Concubine Yan was straightforward. “There is no need. If Prince Qin is in Ganlou Palace, the internal attendants serving His Majesty will report it to me.”

“I do not dare to be insistent.” Fu Rou’s tone changed. “However, because Prince Qin went missing, Your Highness searched the entire six offices and twenty-four departments. It shows how serious things are. If I am not worthy to meet the Emperor, there will be someone worthy enough.”

Concubine Yan narrowed her eyes at Fu Rou threateningly. Fu Rou was calm and unaffected as she bowed and took her leave.

Yan Zifang dismounted and let his horse eat. He walked towards the emerald lake in the forest. Fu Shui had arranged to meet him. However, he was no longer as gullible as before and would not meet and drink with him.

Ever since Fu Shui killed Lian Yan’er in front of him, he knew that Fu Shui was not someone he should hang around with. With no relationship, naturally there would be no loyalty. Fu Shui was also the reason that he had to lie to his best friend and make Sheng Chumu the scapegoat.

In the beginning, what he did was not only for himself but also for his brothers. However, as he saw Ma Haihu drown his sorrows everyday, with not a hint of the past energy he had, it made him perplexed if what he did was right.

Fu Shui was already waiting by the lake. He saw how cold Yan Zifang looked and went straight to the point. "Have you found the person?"

"No." Yan Zifang answered simply.

"Hurry. Do anything to find him." Fu Shui cut things short.

"Why are you so anxious to find this Shu Ziqi person?" Yan Zifang was curious.

"He is useful." Fu Shui would not give him the true answer because Yan Zifang was just a dog running errands for them.

"When you have a use for people, you anxiously want to find them. But when they no longer have any use, you will just send them to their deaths with a cup of wine?" Yan Zifang laughed. *He should have known that no matter how much he did, he was just a lackey to them.*

Fu Shui laughed as well. "Are you still brooding over Lian Yan'er? The glory of ruling over everyone is exchanged with the sacrifices of many lives. If you still cannot understand, then I advise you to quit now and say goodbye to everything that you dream of."

Yan Zifang did not hesitate but only warned in a low voice. "When things are done, you better make Ma Haihu a high-ranking official."

Fu Shui nodded slowly. "I will do what I promise."

The both of them did not realise that behind a tree nearby, Ma Haihu's eyes had widened. Ma Haihu had failed to kill Sheng Chumu. Yet Sheng Chumu did not make things difficult for him and even told him what had happened.

Lian Yan'er was a spy for Yan Zifang and Fu Shui. She entered Duke Lu Residence for information and Sheng Chumu had long found out about it. Sheng Chumu then used her to pass on fake information. One day, Lian Yan'er met with Yan Zifang and Sheng Chumu sent someone to tail them. However, neither his man nor Lian Yan'er returned. He was afraid that things had gone wrong for them.

Initially, Ma Haihu did not believe him. However, he started to grow suspicious when he thought about it further. His leader was the one

who informed him the two times that Lian Yan'er had disappeared. Now that he had personally overheard his leader and Fu Shui's conversation, Ma Haihu finally believed that Fu Shui had killed Lian Yan'er and his leader had known about it.

He did not read much and was more or less illiterate. He could not speak of principles but all he knew was that his leader, who had always been loyal, was now going down Fu Shui's evil path. *As a brother, they only had this life. He had to get rid of Fu Shui!*

Ma Haihu waited for Yan Zifang to leave before stealthily following Fu Shui back to the city. When he saw Fu Shui enter a house, he immediately jumped over the wall and snuck in. Unexpectedly, even before he could steady himself, he got attacked from all four directions and was stabbed to death.

Ma Haihu's blood flowed all the way to the front of Fu Shui's shoes.

"A woman had given up her life to help you fight for a bright future. You only had to wait to enjoy the blessings. But you chose to bring yourself to death's door."

Fu Shui suddenly saw a comb drop from Ma Haihu's side. It was a poorly made comb. He could not help but pick it up as a lonely look flashed across his eyes. His tone remained cold. "Those with a heart are more likely to get hurt and lose their lives, just like you." He casually threw the comb back on the corpse.

Wow...

Court Lady

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Under the plea of Fang Xuanling and other important ministers, Concubine Yan had no choice but to allow Imperial Physician He to give acupuncture to the Emperor. After the acupuncture, the Emperor's finger twitched. Concubine Yan immediately sat beside the bed. She looked as if she wanted to grab his hand in excitement but actually she was frantic.

"Your Majesty!" Fang Xuanling and Linghu Deguan called urgently.

Imperial Physician He reminded, "Although His Majesty is awake, he is still weak. Please slow down the things you want to say."

Concubine Yan heard him but her expression did not change. Her gaze remained fixed on the Emperor.

The Emperor's eyes opened and his slackened gaze slowly focused. When he saw Chief Cao standing behind Concubine Yan, he opened his mouth. His voice was weak and trembling. "Cao...Cao Yangde..."

Fang Xuanling frowned as he looked at Chief Cao.

Chief Cao froze before he walked and leaned on the bedside. He pretended to be moved. "Your Majesty! Your Majesty is finally awake. There is hope for Prince Qin!"

The Emperor's mouth gaped open and he looked shocked.

Chief Cao continued to whine and cry. "Prince Qin has gone missing and Concubine Yan has searched the entire palace but failed to find him. All is well as long as you are awake. What do you want to do?"

"Chief Cao, His Majesty has just awoke, you..." Fang Xuanling did not know what was going on and turned to comfort the Emperor. "Your Majesty, please rest assured. I will definitely find Prince Qin."

When the Emperor saw Concubine Yan, he wanted to lift his hand. Concubine Yan gritted her teeth and held the Emperor's hand down. She cried, "Your Majesty, please do not be agitated, your health is the most important!"

The Emperor's shoulder twitched but no one noticed.

The Emperor looked at Fang Xuanling and struggled, "Enact...enact Prince Qin..." His eyes rolled backwards.

Concubine Yan finished his sentence. "Prince Qin will be safe! General Linghu has already sent people to look for him. Your Majesty, please do not worry. Prince Zhou will manage the country according to your decree. Everything is under control."

The Emperor looked at Concubine Yan with pain and disappointment in his eyes. His head tilted and he fainted. Concubine Yan cried out, "Your Majesty! Your Majesty!"

Imperial Physician He hurried to check. It was only then did Concubine Yan let go of the Emperor's hand and moved away from the bed. She was expressionless.

Imperial Physician He sighed, "It's okay, it's okay. He has just fainted."

Fang Xuanling looked at Chief Cao. He was extremely displeased.

Seeing this, Concubine Yan immediately spoke, "Cao Yangde, how can you bring up Prince Qin's situation and agitate His Majesty? His Majesty has fainted again as soon as he woke up. What shall we do now?"

Chief Cao knelt down. "I deserve to die. When I saw His Majesty

open his eyes today, I was too excited...I deserve to die! Please punish me, Your Highness!”

Concubine Yan snorted, “I won’t take it out on you for now. When His Majesty wakes up, we will let His Majesty decide.” She looked worried as she turned to face Fang Xuanling. “As you all can see, His Majesty needs a lot of undisturbed rest. More haste, less speed.”

Fang Xuanling and Linghu Deguan glanced at each other and had no choice but to leave.

After they left, Concubine Yan fell in a daze as she subconsciously touched the ring on her finger. However, Yu He caught her hand.

“Your Highness, be careful!” It was rare that he was forceful as he flipped Concubine Yan’s hand over.

Inside the ring, there was a small glint. Thankfully, there was medicine on this small thorn that could make the Emperor faint once again.

Concubine Yan suddenly refocused and allowed Yu He to take off the ring. “This medicine won’t hurt the Emperor too badly, right?”

Yu He did not seem to care as he answered, “The amount of medicine given was just enough to make him faint. The ending has yet to be set, so he has to continue living.”

Concubine Yan could hear the murderous intent in his voice and was startled. However, she did not show it as she instructed calmly, “When Prince Zhou inherits the throne as the Crown Prince and makes him the Grand Emperor, he has to wake up. Understood?”

Chief Cao could not help but say, “Your Highness, situations in the palace change very quickly. There are a lot of things that cannot be confirmed.”

Concubine Yan’s eyes turned sharp. “My son will be the most powerful and perfect Emperor in history, how can I let the history books record him as someone who had stolen the throne from his father! His Majesty has to continue living after he gives up the throne. Moreover, he has to live comfortably, enjoy the riches and his

grandchildren. Do you all understand?"

Yu He and Chief Cao kneeled at the same time. "Yes."

Prince Zhou returned to the palace and saw that Fu Rou was arguing with the guards. It was the first time he saw her so agitated.

"What's the problem?" He walked up to them. Only she could easily make him concerned.

"I want to leave the palace. What right do they have to keep me here!" Not only was Fu Rou agitated, she was furious.

"Prince Qin has gone missing and Mother has increased the security around the palace. No one can enter or leave easily. You need her permission." He pulled her hand towards the palace. "You should know that there is no point making things difficult for the guards."

"Let me go!" She wanted to pull her hand back. "I want to see my parents!"

He did not let go nor slow down. "Imperial Father has fainted and Prince Qin is missing. Do you think this is the right time to visit your parents?"

"It is all thanks to your mother!" She blurted out in anger.

At that moment, he stopped and turned to look at her. He knew in his heart that his mother did something to her family.

She did not want to seem weak and stared straight back at him. *How she wished that he would not join the struggle for the throne, maintain his noble and pure heart and continue smiling under the sun. Although she had no romantic feelings for him, there was friendship and she cherished the purity of it.*

"Answer one question and I will help you." Prince Zhou could not understand her gaze. "Where is Prince Qin?"

Fu Rou's eyes darkened. "Out of everyone, I'm most upset you asked

me this.” *In the end, was he going to step on the path of no return?*

Prince Zhou’s eyes were filled with pain. “If I don’t become the Crown Prince and inherit the throne, you should know what will happen to my mother and me.”

Fu Rou froze. “The Emperor fainting, could it...could it be that you...”

Prince Zhou was furious. “Is that how you think of me? After knowing each other for so long, I treat you like one of my own, yet you look at me as if I am cruel? No, I have never hurt my Imperial Father and will never hurt him!” However, his tone changed to one of helplessness. “But things have already turned out this way. I am on a path that I did not choose for myself. At the end of this path, it is Great Tang’s most precious throne. If I cannot sit on it, me and my closest kin will die on this path.”

“You can also brave the torrent and retreat.” *He had other choices.*

“Retreat where? Tell me. Who would let me and my mother go after becoming the crown prince? Li Chengqian? Prince Han Litai? No matter which of them becomes the crown prince, my mother and I will die.” He had long ago seen this clearly. Those biological brothers had never thought of him as a brother.

Fu Rou was determined. “There is Prince Qin.”

“If Prince Qin did not go missing, maybe there is a chance. But he is missing. If he has been captured by someone or harmed, my mother and I won’t be able to prove our innocence even if we jumped into the yellow river. If he purposely hid...”

Fu Rou spoke, “If he purposely hid himself, he will be able to prove your and Concubine Yan’s innocence when he comes back.”

Prince Zhou suddenly reached out and gently held Fu Rou’s face. He laughed bitterly, “Rou’er, you are really not suited for the palace. You are too naïve. If he purposely hid, it means that he is fearful of me and suspects that I would hurt him. With that premonition, the distance between me and Prince Qin will never disappear. When he

ascends the throne, he will kill me.”

“No. Prince Qin will not. I will properly guide him.” Fu Rou was confident in Prince Qin.

“He listens to you now because he is still young. When he grows older and has the power to kill and overlook life, do you think he will still listen to your advice? His mother is Empress Zhangsun and his biological brothers are Li Chengqian and Li Tai. Will he forget that we were born on two different sides?” *This was their predestined fate.*

Fu Rou opened her mouth but could not say anything.

“I have to become the Crown Prince and the next ruler of Great Tang. I promise you that I will treat Imperial Father better than Li Chengqian and I will not kill my brothers. I will be more diligent and lenient than any other ruler.” Prince Zhou pleaded sincerely, “Rou’er, will you tell me where Prince Qin is? He cannot become the Crown Prince but I promise to let him live and at least become a rich noble.”

Fu Rou hesitated, struggling internally. In the end, she shook her head. Although she believed him, she could not trust the ones behind him.

Prince Zhou looked hurt as he let go of Fu Rou’s hand. “I did all of this in order to let my mother live comfortably in the palace. Rou’er, what about you? In order to let your parents live, would you be willing to pay any price?”

“So you planned all of this!” Fu Rou’s eyes were filled with shock.

However, Prince Zhou turned to leave. *Whether he knew or not, whether he did it or not, he no longer had energy to dispute. Because he could only choose his mother. Her decision was equivalent to his decision. It was this pathetic!*

I don't know why there's a thorn on the ring. It is confusing but that's what it says in the raws... lol

Note: Prince Zhou did not plan this. In case you guys think it was part of his plan. He just doesn't want his mother to die. Sigh.

Court Lady

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Fu Rou tossed and turned in bed. She could not fall asleep. She looked at the hazy light that shone in her pitch black room. Sighing, she sat up.

After begging Prince Zhou yesterday, she went to look for Linghu Deguan. Unexpectedly, Linghu Deguan coughed out blood in front of her. Although Chumu was around, it was still chaotic and they were all busy trying to rescue Linghu Deguan. There was no chance for her to speak and she returned without achieving anything.

Later on, the bad news arrived. Linghu Deguan was dead. He had gotten injured during the journey with Prince Qin. In order to fulfil his duties, he had delayed getting treatment and his injury had worsened. In addition, his chef at home added herbal medicine to his food. Although the medicine was not poisonous, it clashed with the prescription given to him by the imperial physician, causing him to cough out blood and die.

It is obvious who instructed the chef. However, now that the general in charge of the imperial guards was gone, Fu Rou understood that she could only count on herself. Although she was already used to bearing the burden, she had never felt so helpless and indecisive.

There were voices outside her door. In the beginning, Fu Rou did not bother about it. However, as soon as she recognised the voice, she

stood up and walked out.

Yu He was in the courtyard.

The light from daybreak shone on his features. His dark palace robe was blown by the wind, like a whirlpool. It was scary and dark.

This internal attendant was always smiling superficially, polite and soft-spoken. When he obtained power, he was extremely wild and malicious. He would root out any outsiders and not care about taking the lives of innocents.

“Chief Yu, what do you want?” With both of them taking standpoints, she could not be bothered to be polite.

Yu He placed the tiered box that he was carrying down. He slowly opened each layer. There were items like a rattle-drum and handkerchief. They were items belonging to her family.

She was extremely frightened internally but maintained a strong exterior. “You can’t prove that my family is in your hands just with these items.”

“Court Lady Fu, what do you want as proof? Your father’s finger? Your mother’s tongue? Or an eyeball from that child of your sister? But even if I bring it over, it will be drenched in blood. Would you be able to recognise it?” *Power could make someone turn ugly.*

“If Concubine Yan dares to touch even a strand of their hair, I will report you to the Justice Office!” *Her words were empty but she did not want to relent.*

“Court Lady Fu, you must be joking. Her Highness is kind and would never hurt anyone. Her Highness sent people to visit your second uncle’s house only because Her Highness looks highly upon you. Who would have known that your entire family would be missing. Apparently they went back to their hometown to visit relatives. Hopefully, they will not get attacked by robbers on the way and be locked in some unknown place, waiting to be slaughtered like pigs and dogs.” Yu He could hide for so many years because he was good at playing with people’s emotions. “If you understand things clearly

now, tell me where Prince Qin is. Maybe Her Highness will help you find them and ensure their safety.”

Fu Rou fell silent for a long while. “I don’t know where Prince Qin is.” *She was not going to exchange a life for a life.*

Yu He laughed, “You don’t know?”

Fu Rou became anxious. “I swear on my life, I really don’t know!”

“Then prove it for Her Highness.” Yu He took out a bottle and threw it on the handkerchief lying in one of the boxes. “Aren’t you swearing with your life? If you can do it, perhaps heaven will pity your family.” *Even if they found out Prince Qin’s location, they did not want Fu Rou to continue living and becoming a stumbling block.*

“If you are still alive past midday, Her Highness will believe that all the things you said were true.” Yu He turned and left.

Fu Rou stood in the wind for a long time. She bent down to pick up the bottle. *She had to think! She had to think properly!*

Prince Zhou came to the Emperor’s palace to meet his mother. However, he was still thinking about how Fu Rou looked when she suspected him. Although he had spoken confidently, he could not help but be suspicious of whether his mother had hid something from him and whether she was truly the main culprit of why his Imperial Father was still unconscious.

At this moment, he stopped the palace servants from reporting his arrival as he walked silently to the door. He saw his mother delicately feeding his Imperial Father medicine. His Imperial Father was unconscious and the majority of the medicine flowed out of his mouth. His mother was patient as she wiped him clean gently and continued to feed him. Although his mother was always gentle to him, he hardly saw the way his parents interacted. He could feel that his mother truly loved and cared for his Imperial Father.

He silently let out a breath and walked towards her. “Mother.

Concubine Yan turned and smiled. "You came just in time, come and talk to your Imperial Father."

Prince Zhou sat by the bed. "Imperial Father looks better all thanks to you. But please do not tire yourself out, Mother."

Concubine Yan looked extremely sympathetically towards the Emperor. "It is my duty. He only has me by his side." *Finally.*

Prince Zhou passed two personal orders to Yu He. "As you instructed, Zhong Yutang will be taking over Linghu Deguan. Yan Zifang will be his assistant. The two of them will control the imperial guards."

Concubine Yan's expression was gentle. "Isn't this good? We can only be relieved when it is our people guarding us inside and outside the palace. As for Fang Xuanling..."

Prince Zhou cut her off. "Fang Xuanling is an important minister for the country, we cannot touch him." Prince Zhou noticed his mother's expression turned bad, and softened his tone. "It is not that I intentionally want to go against you. I am thinking about the future. As literature ministers, they don't have much power. Even if they are unhappy, they can't create much trouble. We should leave them to settle the citizens."

Concubine Yan did not want to make Prince Zhou rebel and nodded. *She would not fight with him.*

Yu He cut in, "Sheng Chumu's hundred men army are all outstanding. Your Highness, what do you have planned for them?"

Concubine Yan added, "Sheng Chumu has achieved outstanding military service time and again. He is capable. But since you can't use him, he is just trouble if we leave him."

"Everything is ready and we are only lacking a little bit. Mother, please rest assured." Prince Zhou's tone changed, "Court Lady Fu's parents..."

Concubine Yan's expression remained the same. "Although she has always gone against me, I know that you care about her. No matter what, I will let her live. When the masses have been settled, you can

do whatever you want as long as you do not name her your Empress. As for her parents, I will definitely not make her your enemy.”

Prince Zhou believed her completely. “Thank you, Mother.”

What do you think will happen?

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As it neared midday, Fu Rou had been sitting in her office for half a day. It was not that she did not do anything, but she has done whatever she could. She was now just waiting for the news.

Zhenzhu walked in. “Court Lady Fu, the princess wants me to inform you that she has no way to get out of the palace and Imperial Guard Sheng has not returned either. She wants me to ask you what is so urgent that you are in such a rush to find General Sheng. If it is really urgent, Her Highness said that she will think of another way. After all, she is the Princess. She can force her way out and no one can do anything about it.”

Fu Rou chuckled bitterly, “There is no need. Zhenzhu, thank you for coming over. Please help me to thank Princess Xinnan.” *Now that Concubine Yan was in charge, she will not tolerate Princess Xinnan’s wilfulness.*

Zhenzhu took her leave.

Fu Rou stretched her palms out and stared distractedly at the bottle for a while. “I can’t gamble. I cannot afford to gamble. But, Prince Qin has to stay alive!” She took off the bottle cap and moved it closer to her mouth.

“Court Lady Fu, I finally...” Yang Bo’s head peeked out from the door. He was smiling.

Fu Rou was startled and the bottle in her hand shook. A few drops spilled out and evaporated into smoke as soon as it touched the ground.

Yang Bo's face changed as he rushed in to snatch the bottle away. He poured the poisonous liquid into the flower bed underneath the window. "I saved your life. But you don't have to be courteous. Why would you do something so stupid? If you have any difficulties, tell me. I will definitely help you."

Fu Rou shook her head. "Even if I tell you, you can't help me."

Yang Bo protested, "If you don't tell me, how do you know that I can't help you? You look so downhearted. Are you really the Court Lady Fu I know?"

Fu Rou plucked up her courage and told him everything that happened.

"So someone is using your family to threaten you and you have to die in order to protect your family." Yang Bo understood. "So you chose to die?"

Fu Rou was helpless. "Yes."

"What if midday passed and you still haven't died?"

"Then my parents, sister, nephew, second uncle and auntie will all be in danger." Fu Rou sighed, "But I can't leave the palace and have no way to tell them the news nor ask someone to save them. It's almost time."

Yang Bo suddenly pursed his lips. "It is not that there is no idea. From what it seems now, you only have one choice, which is to die in order to protect your family. However, I can still help you with the method of death."

Fu Rou did not understand. Yang Bo's eyebrow rose. "Court Lady Fu, when people in the palace are given poison wine to commit suicide, do you know where the poison wine is from?"

Fu Rou's expression shifted slightly.

“That’s right, granting poison wine is done by the internal attendants.” Yang Bo carefully flipped his belt. He revealed a second layer beneath his belt. He pinched out a small item and handed it to Fu Rou. “Chief Cao secretly hid a kind of medicine and I, coincidentally, picked one that dropped.”

Fu Rou took it. “Could this be...a medicine to fake death? But why would Chief Cao hide something like this?”

“Think about it, Chief Cao has served for so many years and has sent out so many imperial orders. He has seen many people die after being granted poison wine. He is afraid that he would be one of them one day.” Yang Bo thought that it was normal.

Fu Rou gave Yang Bo a letter. “In my will, I wrote that I hope to be sent to a crematorium outside the palace after I die so that my family will be able to bring my ashes back to my hometown to bury.”

“Good. When the time comes, I will beg Chief Cao to let me personally send your body out of the palace. I will then find a desolate place and wait for you to wake up. No one will know anything.”

Fu Rou looked at the pill. “Will this really work?”

Yang Bo shrugged. “I can’t help you with this, I have never tried it. I heard that this thing really hurts people. When you consume it, although you will not really die, you will feel a pain equivalent to death.”

“I am not afraid of pain as long as I can live.” Fu Rou tilted her head upwards and lifted her hand.

Yang Bo shouted, “Wait!”

Fu Rou paused and looked at Yang Bo in confusion. Yang Bo said, “Court Lady Fu, I have never tried this pill before and don’t know if it works. If you don’t wake up after consuming it, will your spirit seek revenge on me?”

Fu Rou wanted to laugh. “In order to save my family, I was ready to give up my life. You have given me a thread of hope. I will not seek

revenge on you, I will only pray for heaven to protect you.”

Yang Bo quickly waved. “There is no need to protect me. Just don’t come and scare me at night.”

Fu Rou tilted her head upwards. Yang Bo shouted once again, “Wait!”

Fu Rou sighed, “What now?” *Shouldn’t she be the one that is hesitating?*

Yang Bo said, “Wait for me to leave before you consume it. You are the court lady of the Six Offices. After you take the medicine, you will fall to the ground, your heart will stop beating and you will stop breathing. If other people see me in here, I will be doomed. Let’s not make it such that your death is fake and mine is real. I am leaving.” After he walked out, he even helped to close the door. His voice entered from the small gaps of the door, “Wait for me to walk far before taking it.”

Fu Rou sat alone for a while. After she thought that it was about time, she muttered to herself, “Father, Mother, Fu Yin, Shan’er, Second Uncle, Second Aunt, I will fight to live. So you all have to be safe.”

Fu Rou tilted her head back, ready to eat the Fake Death Pill. However, the door was pushed open forcefully. This time, the one who interrupted her ‘suicide’ was Sheng Chuling.

Sheng Chuling stared at the pill in her hands, and immediately took it. “What is this?”

“Don’t bother about me. Give it back.” Fu Rou immediately snatched it back.

“If not for Elder Brother’s orders, I can’t be bothered with you.” He really could not understand the relationship between these two. It made him confused as to what to call her.

“Did Chumu ask you to come? But you are too late, even if you send the news now, it won’t make it in time.” She had no way out.

Sheng Chuling mumbled, “What choice did I have? Yesterday night, Elder Brother was busy trying to send your parents out of

Chang'an..."

Fu Rou suddenly grabbed onto Sheng Chuling's arm. "What did you say? My parents?"

"I came to find you especially for this." He did not idle. "Elder Brother wanted me to tell you that he has already sent your parents, your sister and your what second uncle...anyway, they have all been sent off to a place that only Elder Brother knows. You can rest assured."

"Really?" Fu Rou was delighted.

Sheng Chuling looked weirdly at her. "Of course it is true. Did you think I have nothing to do so I came here just to entertain you? I will only do that for Xinnan. Eh? Why are you so emotional?"

"Concubine Yan was lying to me. My parents are safe..." She looked at the medicine in her hand and rushed to throw it away. As she thought about it, she started to feel fear. But when she thought about Chumu, a sweetness came into her heart. "How did Chumu know that Concubine Yan would try to attack my family? How did he send my parents out of Chang'an before Concubine Yan? He is too amazing."

"Of course, Elder Brother is an exceptionally talented general. He has the ability to predict things. So Sister-in-law--" *Forget it, Elder Brother probably will not repeat this again. He should just call her Sister-in-law.* "In the future, you better be submissive, respectful..."

Fu Rou looked at him coldly and Sheng Chuling quickly changed his tone. "Actually, Elder Brother values you greatly. Ever since he returned from Daci'en Temple, he has sent someone to secretly protect your family. However, the people that he sent said that he found suspicious people lurking near your second uncle's house. Perhaps they were here to scout first. Elder Brother was worried that your family would be in danger and immediately sent them out of Chang'an."

Fu Rou could finally feel relieved. She turned to take out an intricate puppet from the cupboard behind her. "For you."

“For me? Or for Elder Brother?”

“For you.” She was grateful to him too. “Chuling, you gave me the news that I wished for the most. I know that you don’t lack anything in the Duke Lu Residence and can only give this to you. This was given to me by a subordinate out of respect. Take it for Princess Xinnan, she will definitely like it.”

“Xinnan really likes this kind of children's toy. She is so childish.” Although this was what Sheng Chuling said, he also enjoyed playing with those things. “Thank you, Sister-in-law. I am going to Xinnan’s place for my duty. Do you have anything you want me to tell Elder Brother?”

Fu Rou did not even think about it. “Tell Chumu that he is the most indomitable, mightiest and capable man in my heart.” *Now, passing on a message is not easy, she could not be reserved anymore. She had to take the chance.*

Sheng Chuling coughed, “Oh my god, Sister-in-law, you usually don’t say romantic things but when you do, it is huge. It is even more cringey than Elder Brother.”

Fu Rou watched Sheng Chuling walk out. Her legs gave way and she fell to the ground.

“Fu Rou ah Fu Rou, Prince Zhou was right. You are too naïve. You almost gave away your life just because of what someone else said. You always think you are smart but you were deceived by your own cleverness.” She let out a long breath and patted her heart. She had a rare moment of wittiness. “I must definitely not let Chumu find out, if not he will scold me to death.”

Fu Rou walked over and picked up the Fake Death Pill and placed it in a small bottle. She shook it lightly and listened to the sound of the pill rolling in the bottle. Her expression became serious. *Next time, she would use it correctly.*

omg they completely cut this scene from the drama -_-” It's soooooooooo confusing to watch. Good thing you guys are reading!

Court Lady

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Xinnan manipulated the puppet. All of its four limbs were active and even the head could turn. It was an extremely adorable toy. In the past, she would not bear to let it go. However, now she found it dull.

When her Imperial Mother was around, she was rarely stressed. Her brothers, Crown Prince and Prince Han, would always protect her. Although she knew they were fighting, she distanced herself from it. However, everything changed after her Imperial Mother passed away. Both her brothers were now in prison and her Imperial Father was ill. Concubine Yan was controlling the entire palace. No matter how immature she was, she knew that she should try to stay in her own palace. Ever since Grand Prince Liang tried to pick a fight with Chuling for no reason, she understood that if she wanted him to be safe, she had to lay low.

Sheng Chuling saw Xinnan frown. He knew exactly what she was worried about. However, he pulled open his mouth and brought his face in front of her, making a funny face.

“Why? Do you now like it? I know that this tiny thing is not as cute as me. But you should just accept it. It is from Sister-in-law.”

Xinnan's mood was brightened by him for a moment before she went back to her melancholy state. “I like it. Thank you.”

“If you like it, then don't give such a sad face. You make me upset.”

Sheng Chuling stretched two fingers out and touched the dimples on Xinnan's face. "Learn from me. Smile brightly."

"You just look happy but you actually have a lot of worries." Sheng Chuling had lost an elder sister and a younger brother. Xinnan was afraid that in this chaos, they would lose each other as well. "Chuling, let's get through any difficulties together. You don't have to pretend to be happy in front of me."

Sheng Chuling froze slightly before a flicker of emotion ran through his eyes. He lightly held her. "My Xinnan is so understanding. You understand human emotions so well. I have good taste."

Xinnan remained in his embrace quietly. "This is my home yet I am feeling more and more afraid to stay here. Every time your roster ends and it is time for you to leave, I am afraid that you will not appear ever again." *What is scarier is that if something like that happens, she would not even know who to ask for help.*

"Don't worry, I am intending to ask my superior to stay in the palace temporarily. Then I can always accompany you." *There have been movements in the palace and he was worried.*

Xinnan's expression was bitter. "Linghu Deguan is dead and Concubine Yan's men are in charge now. It may not be so easy."

"Even though they have bad intentions, they are still following the rules. The Emperor has only fallen ill, there is no need to fall out..."

Before Sheng Chuling finished his sentence, numerous footsteps could be heard from outside. There were also astonished shouts from palace servants.

"Chuling..." Xinnan grabbed onto Sheng Chuling's sleeve. Sheng Chuling smiled, "Don't worry, I am here."

The two of them entered the courtyard only to see Yan Zifang leading a group of royal guards. They aggressively push away anyone who was in their way. As soon as Yan Zifang saw Sheng Chuling, he ordered, "He is there, catch him!"

The royal guards moved forward to clamp Sheng Chuling down.

Xinnan blocked their way and declared, “Who dares to take him away!”

Yan Zifang was cold. “These are issues of the military. Your Highness should stay out of it.”

Xinnan turned back and glared at Yan Zifang. “Back then, if not for Chuling’s elder brother speaking up for you in front of the Emperor, you would have still been a wanted pirate!”

Yan Zifang was not moved. “I am serving the country. I am fair and will not bring my personal feelings into it. Sheng Chuling has committed a crime. As his superior, I have to discipline him.”

“I would like to know, what crime has he committed?” Xinnan’s eyes were clear.

Yan Zifang held back his laugh. “It is not convenient for me to tell you. If you insist on knowing, you should ask Concubine Yan.”

Sheng Chuling looked stern. “Xinnan, don’t worry. I will be fine!” Yan Zifang waved his hand and they dragged him away.

Concubine Yan looked on coldly as Xinnan panted in front of her. It was obvious that Xinnan had run here. However, she was not Empress Zhangsun. Even if she was an honorary princess, there was no sweet for her here.

“Why did you capture Sheng Chuling?” Xinnan demanded. Concubine Yan did not say anything and simply looked at Yu He.

Yu He understood. “Sheng Chuling has been exposed by two of his colleagues to his superior. Sheng Chuling has acted inappropriately during his duties. He met with you secretly, is careless and promiscuous.”

“Bastard!” *Isn’t he criticising her as well?* “Imperial Father asked you to support the six palaces. Is this how you support? You despicable person. You tarnished the reputation of royal women and ruined the royal family’s reputation. Not only did you not scold them, you

ordered them to barge into my palace to catch someone? When Imperial Father wakes up, let's see how you will explain it to him!"

Concubine Yan was nonchalant. "I will explain to the Emperor. The one that ruined the royal family's reputation are not those that reported but it is you, Princess Xinnan."

Xinnan was furious. "How can you anyhow make a decision just from a few nonsensical reports!"

The corners of Concubine Yan's mouth curled up. "Princess, you are wrong. I personally saw the ambiguous relationship you have with Sheng Chuling. Do you remember that one night when I bumped into both of you? If I did not see wrongly, weren't the both of you holding hands?"

Although Xinnan felt slightly uneasy, she put on a brave front. "Even so, my relationship with Sheng Chuling is not as bad as you think."

Concubine Yan's eyes were emotionless. "Xinnan, you are the Emperor's favourite daughter and that's why I chose to keep it a secret at that time. But you don't know what's good for you and came to make a racket at my place. Don't blame me for being strict."

A group of palace maids were dragged in by internal attendants. There were blood stains on their body. It was obvious that they had been tortured. They all started saying how Princess Xinnan would occasionally go missing. After Sheng Chuling became an imperial guard, he would often enter the princess' palace and Zhenzhu definitely knew about it.

Concubine Yan immediately ordered for Zhenzhu to be captured and be beaten in front of Xinnan. She ordered Zhenzhu to tell the truth on Xinnan and Sheng Chuling's secret meetings.

Zhenzhu was loyal and refused to admit. However, she was beaten horribly by the internal attendants who did not hold back. Her screams became weaker and weaker.

Xinnan could no longer hold her silence. "Stop! Stop hitting her!"

Concubine Yan did not ask them to stop and sneered, ""Princess, I am

listening. You can say whatever you want to say.”

“That’s right. Sheng Chuling and I have an affinity for each other and want to be together for the rest of our lives. However, I have already told Imperial Mother and Imperial Father has promised to grant us marriage. That’s why Sheng Chuling was transferred to become a guard at my place.” Although Xinnan was telling the truth, she did not feel happy.

Concubine Yan’s expression did not change. “Grant you marriage? I have never heard the Emperor mention it. You have no proof and cannot be trusted.”

Xinnan held back her anger and lowered her voice. “I am speaking the truth. When Imperial Father is awake, everything will be revealed.”

“As long as the Emperor is unconscious, I am the one making the decisions. A princess that has yet to be married is actually repeatedly meeting in secret with a guard. You have disregarded all rules and etiquette, shaming the royal family. What is more heartbreaking is that you don’t seem to be ashamed or regretful.” Her tone changed and Concubine Yan looked at her pitifully. “Xinnan, you were raised by the late Empress and the Emperor dotes on you greatly. You should not disappoint them like this.”

Concubine Yan lowered her eyes and looked at Zhenzhu. “As Her Highness’ personal maid, you should be keeping the princess in check. Instead, you allowed her to be bewitched and caused her to make a huge mistake. Zhenzhu cannot be forgiven. She is to be beaten to death.”

“How dare you!” Xinnan wanted to dash to Zhenzhu’s side but was held back by two palace maids. She could not help but shout, “I have already admitted everything, why can’t you let her go?”

“It is only natural for a servant to suffer for her master.” Concubine Yan was determined to deal with Sheng Chuling and was taking the chance to set an example to others. “Who asked her master to be disobedient?”

Xinnan was fuming as she struggled. “Concubine Yan! When Imperial Father wakes up, I will tell him how cruel and brutal you are!”

“Stop!” Fu Rou walked in with a group of female officials. However, Zhenzhu coughed out blood. She had already stopped breathing.

Xinnan struggled out of the palace maids’ grasp and ran to Zhenzhu. She wailed. She never thought that she would implicate Zhenzhu.

Fu Rou frowned as she lifted her eyes to ask Concubine Yan, “Your Highness, may I ask what Zhenzhu has done such that she was beaten to death?”

Yu He answered on her behalf, “Princess Xinnan has been secretly meeting up with Sheng Chuling. They have acted promiscuous in the palace. Zhenzhu is the princess’ confidante and she knew about it yet did not report. She even encouraged them. She has committed a terrible crime.”

Concubine Yan finally spoke, “I am just thinking for the Princess’ future that’s why I punished the people around her.”

Fu Rou was fair. “Princess Xinnan is at fault and should be handed over to the Rites Office to be taught. Zhenzhu has committed a crime and should be handed to the Managerial Department to be punished.”

Concubine Yan’s face fell. However, her gaze fell on the group of female officials behind Fu Rou and she had no choice but to reign in her temper. “Court Lady Fu, don’t you think you are too late?”

Yu He made a play on words. “It is already noon and the sun is right above us.”

Fu Rou played with words as well. “That’s good. Only when the sun is slightly poisonous then can it get rid of demons. Chief Yu, you said Princess Xinnan is at fault, why do you say so?”

Yu He replied, “She met secretly with guards and behaved promiscuously in the palace. Her Highness personally witnessed them.”

Fu Rou tilted her head. “Rites Official Wu, is there a way to examine

promiscuity in the palace?”

Rites Official Wu replied carefully, “Depending on different situations, the way to check is different. The princess has yet to be married so to check whether she has conducted wanton behaviour, we can just check her chastity.”

Concubine Yan pretended to be nice. “She is a golden branch after all, there is no need...”

Xinnan suddenly lifted her head. “We have to check!” She immediately got up and pulled open her top.

The people in the place did not dare to look at her straight. Concubine Yan felt that something was wrong and was about to say something. However, Fu Rou cut in front of her. “Your Highness, could it be that because you are the witness, you are not going to allow Her Highness prove her own innocence?”

Concubine Yan sat up straight and took on an imposing manner. “I am trying to protect the Princess’ reputation. Since she doesn’t care, why do I need to try to protect her?”

Rites Official Wu instructed the female officials and they immediately got to work. They moved a screen over and hung up a curtain.

Xinnan entered. Rites Official Wu and a nanny that Concubine Yan arranged were to examine her together. They quickly reached a conclusion, Xinnan was undeniably a virgin.

Concubine Yan’s expression did not change. “Even if it is not true that they were promiscuous, meeting with a guard without regard for the rules is still the Princess’ fault.”

Xinnan was furious. “You are twisting words! Despicable and shameless! You killed an innocent person! Return Zhenzhu to me!”

Fu Rou held Xinnan back and politely spoke to Concubine Yan. “When did I say that Her Highness was not at fault? However, from this scene, is it obvious that there are untruths in this accusation. There was also intention to exaggerate the suspicions. Your Highness is kind, if you had found out the truth earlier and it was not as

serious as you thought, I believe that you would not need to be so cruel as to beat Zhenzhu to death, right?”

Concubine Yan pretended to be kind. “Of course. I am not willing to beat palace maids to death as well. However, this issue was huge and I had to be strict. Since it is not as serious as I thought, I am reasonable. I will make amends and give Zhenzhu a proper burial.”

Fu Rou continued, “Your Highness, other than Zhenzhu, this issue also affects Imperial Guard Sheng Chuling. I heard that Sheng Chuling has been captured. In order to prevent another unfortunate killing of an innocent, please allow me and Rites Official Wu to be present.”

Xinnan immediately understood what Fu Rou meant as she gritted her teeth. “You beat Zhenzhu to death and now you want to do the same to Sheng Chuling? I will not agree! Don’t forget that Imperial Father is still around!”

Concubine Yan looked at everyone in the room and felt an unknown pressure. “You can observe Sheng Chuling’s trial. However, only Court Lady Fu is allowed. The Rites Office is in charge of etiquette and should take responsibility for the fact that the princess has acted out. Rites Official Wu is not suitable to manage the Rites Office.”

Fu Rou bit her lip, not willing to give in. Rites Official Wu helped solve the issue. “I am at fault and I am willing to be punished.”

Fu Rou hesitated but understood when she met with Rites Official Wu’s calm gaze. “Superior Xu, Rites Official Wu’s handover shall be managed by your Managerial Department. The punishment should only come after understanding the full story.”

Superior Xu acknowledged and ordered people to capture Rites Official Xu. Concubine Yan knew that Fu Rou was unhappy. “The Rites Office needs to be cleaned up. How is it enough to just punish Rites Official Xu? I have someone in mind, I wonder if Court Lady Fu would agree with me.”

“Who does Your Highness want to recommend?” Fu Rou understood that if she rejected, Concubine Yan would not let this matter go.

Concubine Yan called out, “Official Zhuang.”

A female official stepped forward and kneeled, “Yes, Your Highness.”

Concubine Yan spoke, “From today onwards, you will be in charge of the Rites Office.”

Official Zhuang was delighted as her eyes spun. “Thank you for the promotion, Your Highness. I will clean up the Rites Office properly and not let you down. Since Princess Xinnan has admitted to her faults, the Rites Office will guide her properly so that she will behave appropriately from now on.”

Behind Fu Rou, all the female officials’ expressions were not looking good. Fu Rou fell silent. *The more anxious she was, the more her opponent would be delighted. She was not going to let them get what they wanted.*

Court Lady

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Fu Rou has never been to the Imperial Guards Office. Although she did not know how it was like in the past, the place now felt dark. There were groups of imperial guards donned in armor and their weapons, looking ready to kill. Yan Zifang walked out. He was also wearing soft armour as well as boots. His aura felt different from the past. In the past, he seemed to be striving for justice, now his entire person appeared gloomy.

“Court Lady Fu, what do you want?” The warm and kind elder brother, justified pirate, and her only drinking buddy was gone.

“I am here on Concubine Yan’s personal order to observe Sheng Chuling’s trial.” Everyone had their own ambitions, she would not force him.

“Sheng Chuling injured his guard and escaped.” Yan Zifang’s expression was cold.

“I don’t believe it.” Fu Rou’s reaction was fast. *This place is guarded so heavily, how could he escape?*

“He escaped. The Imperial Guard Office does not need to explain to the Six Offices.” Yan Zifang walked by Fu Rou, “Excuse me for not keeping you company. I have to go and catch the escapee. I am not as free as you.”

“Yan Zifang!” Fu Rou could not help but shout. Yan Zifang turned back, “If you have something to say, hurry and say it.”

“Even until today, when people in Guangzhi County speak about your father, Yan Xianwei, they would compliment him and admire him for being justified and selfless. He never bent over for power and riches. You will only disappoint Uncle Yan’s spirit in heaven.” Fu Rou did not force him but will still say this.

“Disappoint?” Yan Zifang wanted to laugh. “Father threw his own life away. Do you know the real reason why my family was torn apart?”

“Power.” Yan Zifang’s mouth twitched. “Being upright without power is just stupid. I don’t want to walk the same road as my father. I advise you to be open minded. Concubine Yan needs capable people.”

Fu Rou stared at him for a moment before chuckling. “No wonder Yingying left. Yan Zifang, you are not worthy of her.”

Yan Zifang froze before a sinister look appeared on his face. “Do you know where she is?”

Fu Rou raised her brows. “I don’t know.”

Yan Zifang’s gaze was frightening. “You must have met her.”

Fu Rou did not comment. “I will take my leave, you don’t have to send me off, General Yan.” It was her turn to walk past Yan Zifang.

Yan Zifang grabbed Fu Rou’s elbow. He asked urgently, “Tell me where she is!”

“Let Sheng Chuling go or you can forget about it!” Fu Rou pulled with all her might and managed to get rid of his hold.

Yan Zifang’s anxious expression slowly turned cold. “I don’t know what you are saying. How can I release a criminal that has already escaped?” He knocked into Fu Rou’s shoulder and walked off.

In Fu Rou’s eyes, Yan Zifang had made a choice between love and power. She had only one choice left. She was going to find Sheng

Chumu and not fight alone anymore.

As soon as Yan Zifang walked out of the palace gates, his proud expression disappeared.

He used to have comrades in arms, good friends and comparable but respectful opponents. Now, there was no one. Suddenly, a huge gust of wind blew and a paper flew towards him. He reacted quickly and caught it. It was a picture of Haihu. He narrowed his eyes. He folded the paper and kept it. All of a sudden, a shadow shot out from a side alley and knocked him off his horse.

Yan Zifang rolled on the floor. When he lifted his head, his eyes flashed with a cold glare. "Sheng Chumu!"

Sheng Chumu growled, "Hand Chuling over!"

Yan Zifang let out a short laugh, "Those kites really had a problem."

When he was on duty today, he saw many kites in the sky. He had been suspicious and ordered the imperial guards to strengthen their patrol but they did not find anything amiss. Because of his experience as a pirate, he even took one of the kites to check and saw that there were uncommon thread marks. However, he could not understand what they meant. *So this was how Fu Rou sent messages to Sheng Chumu!*

Sheng Chumu did not say a second word as he drew his sword and attacked Yan Zifang. Yan Zifang pulled out his sword and blocked his attack.

"Yan Zifang, you should just go back to being a pirate. At least then your evil side is outrightly displayed." Sheng Chumu flicked his wrist. With all kinds of sword techniques, he trapped Yan Zifang.

Yan Zifang was disadvantaged. "If you kill me, Sheng Chuling will die with me!"

Sheng Chumu's sword brushed Yan Zifang's ear and pierced the wall. Yan Zifang did not blink. "If you want to see your younger brother, you better listen to me."

Sheng Chumu snorted, “What are you trying to do?”

“Doing what you said. Outrightly being bad.” Yan Zifang raised his brows.

Not far away, lamps were lit in the corridor. The beautiful courtyard in the day was not drenched in darkness. Fu Rou silently stood behind a fake mountain. When she heard footsteps, she slowly peeped out. She was in no rush to move.

The person that came looked left and right, acting slightly suspicious. It was only when they reached the front of the fake mountain did they mumble, “Where is she?” It was then that Fu Rou stretched out her hand and tapped the person’s shoulder.

That person turned back in shock, ready to shout. Fu Rou lowered her voice, “It’s me.” At the same time, she pulled the person behind the fake mountain.

“Woman, this entire place is on high alert. Why did you still ask to meet me?” The person that came was Fu Rou’s only good friend, Li Baolin.

“Are you sure no one followed you?” Fu Rou asked.

“How can that be! I was extremely careful.” Li Baolin was quite proud. “You are not afraid of anything and have offended Concubine Yan. If she knows that I am close to you and met you in the middle of the night, I won’t live to see the sun.”

Fu Rou was really worried. “You also came from the Six Offices and Twenty-four Departments. Does Concubine Yan suspect our relationship?” The entire Six Offices had become a thorn in Concubine Yan’s eyes.

Li Baolin was proud. “I am not a bookworm like you. I am a little smart and best at surviving in the cracks. Ever since the Empress passed away, I sensed that something was not right between you and Concubine Yan and I made sure to occasionally complain about you. Don’t you realise that I haven’t invited you for tea recently?”

Fu Rou shook her head and Li Baolin wanted to laugh. “You are so slow.”

Fu Rou laughed as well. “It is not too late to realise. Tell me, what do you complain about?”

Li Baolin rolled her eyes. “Sigh, you have forgotten everything. Back then, when you first entered the Seamstress Department, you were always stepping over me. You even stole the Head Seamstress position that would have been mine. How can you do that to me?”

Fu Rou pretended to be guilty. “That’s right, that’s right. But after you became a Baolin, we still continued to interact.”

Li Baolin felt like she did not understand. “Even since you were a Siyan, the late Empress was behind you. Who would dare to offend you? Moreover, in the palace, everyone smiles towards each other but as soon as they turn their backs, the curses and complaints will come out.”

Fu Rou laughed, “Okay, smart person. It is good that you were prepared. I was afraid that I would implicate you when I went against Concubine Yan. Now that she holds the most power, you have to take care.”

“You...” Li Baolin’s voice hitched as she was moved, “Rest assured, I am very scared of dying. Hurry and tell me. Why did you ask me out tonight?”

Fu Rou became serious. “How is your relationship with Concubine Qiao?”

“It is okay, we hang out occasionally.” Li Baolin realised, “Why? Are you trying to get Concubine Qiao to plead for Princess Xinnan?”

“You guessed half of it. Princess Xinnan has been locked up by Official Zhuang. Concubine Yan is in power, but I have a way to help her escape. If we are lucky, it will set Concubine Yan back. However, I need others to help me.”

Li Baolin muttered, “Concubine Qiao has Princess Yueyang and her position is closer to Concubine Yan. Will she dare to go against

Concubine Yan? Concubine Yan's powers now surpass that of the Empress. Even the imperial guards listen to her."

"If Concubine Qiao is alone, she would definitely not dare. But with her position, she can convince the other concubines to meet Concubine Yan together. She has to choose the right time as well. Two days later." Fu Rou was confident.

"Why is there a need to choose a time?" Li Baolin wondered.
Auspicious?

Fu Rou leaned in to Li Baolin's ear and whispered.

There will be a mass release!!

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Xinnan was lying flat on the couch. Her face was exhausted and pale. She was no longer angry.

Concubine Yan rushed over. Seeing how Xinnan looked, the hope left in her disappeared. She turned back to glare furiously at Official Zhuang and internally scolded her for being a fool. The first stupid move of hers was to not observe Xinnan properly and did not realise that she was suicidal. The second stupid move was that she did not know when to report it and actually reported it in front of the other concubines.

Before this, in order to establish her prestige, she momentarily became strict. Today, all the concubines had come to plead for Xinnan. Concubine Yan had made it sound nice and mentioned that she was going to grant Xinnan a pardon. In the end, the situation turned into one that she could not redeem. Having killed the daughter of the Empress, she now had such a bad reputation. Who would dare to truly follow her?

Zhong Yutang came up to report, "When I rushed here, Her Highness had already passed away."

Yan Zifang cut in, "Looking at Her Highness, she must have taken poison."

Concubine Yan was burning with fury. She directed her anger at

Official Zhuang. “What have you been doing? Who gave you the guts to drive Her Highness to her death?” At this point, she could only find a scapegoat.

Official Zhuang was aghast. “I did everything according to your instructions...” First, starve the Princess for a few days until she has no energy to act wildly.

Yu He stepped up to slap her. “Atrocious! How dare you push the blame to Her Highness?”

Officials Zhuang kneeled and did not dare to say anything more.

Yan Zifang suddenly said, “Your Highness asked the Rites Office to teach the princess etiquette. This has been a rule in the palace since a long time ago. It is not the first time the Princess has been taught, why would she commit suicide?”

Yu He agreed, “When the late Empress was around, the Princess had also been instructed strictly by Rites Official Situ because of her stubbornness. The Princess’ death is not Your Highness fault.”

Concubine Yan was delighted. *Finally, someone was thinking for her.*

“Maybe the Princess did not commit suicide but was murdered by someone. Princess Xinnan’s personality is rash and she would occasionally be intolerant towards others. Perhaps...” Yan Zifang paused.

Zhong Yutang cut him off, “Maybe someone hated her and took the chance to put poison in her food, making it seem like Princess Xinnan had committed suicide because of Your Highness’ punishment. They would kill the Princess and frame Your Highness.”

Concubine Yan thought that he was reasonable. “With such intentions, the person must be malicious.”

“The murderer must be in the palace. Your Highness, please hand this issue over to me, I will investigate thoroughly!” Zhong Yutang spoke and glanced towards the palace maids who were crying outside.

Concubine Yan understood. “I will have to trouble you, General

Zhong.”

Zhong Yutang ordered, “Men! Bring all the palace maids back to interrogate them!”

The imperial guards brought the frantic palace maids away. Official Zhuang saw and shrunk in fright.

Yan Zifang noticed, “Your Highness, Official Zhuang was appointed by you to teach the Princess...”

Zhong Yutang was discourteous and cut Yan Zifang off once more, “Because she was appointed by Her Highness, we should arrest her for interrogation in order to bring justice to Her Highness.”

Official Zhuang climbed up to hug Concubine Yan’s leg. “I am extremely loyal to Your Highness! Whenever I help Your Highness to do things, I have never let anything leak...”

Concubine Yan’s face changed. Yu He lowered his voice, “Audacious! You are a female official. It is your duty to serve Her Highness!”

“General Zhong, I will not protect anyone. You can go ahead and investigate properly.” She was just giving up a tiny pawn. Concubine Yan would not even blink for the loss.

Official Zhuang was horrified. “Your Highness! Your Highness, please be gracious! Even if I have no achievements, I have put in a lot of effort all these years. When Your Highness first entered the palace...”

Yu He took out a silk handkerchief and stuffed it into Official Zhuang’s mouth. “General Zhong, this woman spouts nonsense and knows how to lie very well. You should teach her a lesson before she goes around spouting whatever she wants.”

“Please rest assured, Your Highness.” Zhong Yutang looked coldly at Yan Zifang. He tilted his head and left.

Yan Zifang saw but did not pay heed. “Your Highness, since this is a murder, shouldn’t Her Highness’ body be placed in the Imperial Guard Office?”

Concubine Yan nodded. "Let's shift her to the Imperial Guard Office. Quickly examine the body and protect the princess' honour."

Fu Shui arrived at Ganlou Palace and greeted Chief Cao, who was standing guard at the main door. Chief Cao smiled lightly, "Imperial Physician Yang, you don't have to be so courteous."

Fu Shui was modest. "It is thanks to Chief Cao that we are where we are today. I should be grateful." He looked in and vaguely saw Concubine Yan's figure through the screen. She was currently feeding the Emperor medicine.

Chief Cao looked at where Fu Shui was looking. "Are you looking for Her Highness for something?"

"I guess I came at the wrong time." Fu Shui smiled, "I just came to tell Her Highness that using Sheng Chuling as a bait was useful. Sheng Chumu has taken our bait and we can get rid of him tonight."

Chief Cao was in a daze as he looked at Fu Shui. Fu Shui smiled, "Chief Cao, why are you looking at me like that?"

Chief Cao sighed, "Imperial Physician Yang, you are calm and composed when you speak and are dazzling. You really look like the previous emperor. For a moment, I felt as if I was transported to the past."

Fu Shui was not surprised. "A grandson would naturally resemble his grandfather. I have things to do. Can you help me tell Her Highness regarding Sheng Chumu?"

Fu Shui turned to leave. Chief Cao stared at his back view for a long time.

At this moment, Concubine Yan was talking to Yu He while feeding the Emperor medicine.

Yu He reported, "Prince Zhou has found out about Princess Xinnan."

Concubine Yan sighed, "Is he in a bad mood?"

Yu He spoke with intention, "His Highness is too soft-hearted. If he was as heartless as Fu Shui, it would simplify things."

Concubine Yan frowned. "Fu Shui has his soft-hearted times as well and he is soft-hearted in the area where he should not be." *Her son just placed high importance on relationships, he was not tolerant to his enemies.*

Yu He was silent.

Concubine Yan continued, "As we slowly reach our goal, we have to be decisive. We cannot let any of Zhangsun's sons live. Especially Li Chengqian, who has been the Crown Prince for years. Letting him live will pose a huge problem. Now the Emperor is unconscious and Li Chengqian and Li Tai are both in the palace, this is an extremely rare opportunity."

Yu He was in a difficult position. "Fu Shui hardly ever requests anything. But once he does, he is extremely serious. If we ignore his objection and do something to Li Chengqian, I am afraid..."

Concubine Yan narrowed her eyes. "For someone to die, it does not mean we have to do anything. There are times when not doing anything, or doing minimal things, is sufficient."

Yu He understood what she meant. "Fu Shui has been very busy recently. He should not be visiting the Internal Attendant Prison. The relationship between the Crown Prince and Prince Han is fragile and cannot be agitated. If we just do something small, we can make both of them suffer."

Concubine Yan was comforted. "Very good."

But not all things would go as smoothly as Concubine Yan wished. For example, that very night, the Imperial Guards Office caught on fire and burnt the room that Xinnan's corpse was in...

When Concubine Yan heard Zhong Yutang report, she could not help but become furious.

"Recently, the weather has been very dry and it is easy for fires to break out." Zhong Yutang did not want to take responsibility. "I used

the quickest fire rescue team to put out the fire and put it out before the fire got any worse. If I did not do so, the consequences would have been dire.”

Concubine Yan was furious, “It is okay to burn anything but it actually burned the room that Xinnan’s body was in. Did we manage to retrieve the Princess’ body?”

Zhong Yutang shook his head. “That was the area that was affected the most. Not to mention the corpse, even her bones will be difficult to find.”

There has already been small talk regarding Xinnan’s death. With what happened today, there was no way for her to make up for it. As she thought about this, Concubine Yan was extremely unhappy.

Zhong Yutang immediately used Yan Zifang as a sacrificial victim. “This is all because Yan Zifang shifted Princess Xinnan’s body to the Imperial Guard Office without asking me. If I knew that the Princess’ body was there, I would have instructed them to be more careful.”

Yan Zifang was dissatisfied with looking weak and attacked back coldly. “I would have stayed silent but since General Zhong wants to push the blame on me, I have to tell the truth.”

Concubine Yan raised her brows. “What truth?”

Yan Zifang said, “The reason why the fire grew so big so quickly was because there was a huge stash of wine in the Imperial Guard Office. General Zhong enjoys drinking and would drink during every meal. When the fire came into contact with the wine, it caused the body to be burned until nothing was left.”

Concubine Yan’s gaze was piercing as she stared at Zhong Yutang. “Is what Yan Zifang said true?”

Zhong Yutang was in an awkward position. “This...my subordinates demanded to pledge their loyalty to me and gave it to me to celebrate my promotion. I had intended to give them back in a few days. I never thought...”

“Stop talking!” Zhong Yutang had been personally selected by her,

now she had no choice but to suffer in silence. “And the issue with Xinnan’s corpse cannot be known to others. Hurry and find a replacement body. General Yan, please oversee this.”

Zhong Yutang’s expression was horrible.

Yan Zifang accepted. “Yes. I will handle it properly. From what I see now, Princess Xinnan might not have committed suicide but she was actually murdered by Official Zhuang. What does Your Highness think about Official Zhuang committing suicide for her crime?”

Concubine Yan smiled. “No wonder Fu Shui always praises you for being capable. You dare to think and act. Let’s go according to your suggestion.”

Yan Zifang took his leave. Zhong Yutang wanted to fight for himself. “Your Highness...”

Concubine Yan’s expression was cold. “Aren’t you leaving! You can’t even do something so small. How can I count on you to do bigger things!”

Zhong Yutang was dejected as he left. Yu He stepped up. “Please don’t be angry, Your Highness, don’t hurt your health.”

Concubine Yan shook her head and let out a deep breath. *Ever since Xinnan’s incident, she had been feeling unsettled. However, she did not know why. She hoped that she was thinking too much. Xinnan was just a princess. In the future, the entire world would belong to her son and she would have power. Everyone would be beneath her.*

In the drama, Xinnan supposedly dies in a fire.

Court Lady

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Fu Rou opened her eyes. The candlelight illuminated a tall figure standing in front of her bed.

“Your Highness.” She wanted to get up but Prince Zhou pressed down on her shoulder. “Lie down. Imperial Physician He said that you were extremely upset and have to rest.”

“Shu’er told you.” Fu Rou still wanted to sit up. “It is no big deal.”

Prince Zhou grabbed her hand and his gaze was as gentle as water. “I remember the time when you were very ill and I took care of you the entire time. I was happier than anyone when I saw you slowly recover as the days passed.”

Fu Rou was uncomfortable. “Your Highness, I have made myself clear.”

Prince Zhou only cared about himself. “I want you to become more ill. I want you to be so ill so that you cannot interfere with the things going on in the palace. I wish that you could temporarily fall asleep like Imperial Father. When you wake up, everything will be over and the days that greet you would be the clear days after the storm. I will also always be waiting for you.”

Fu Rou pulled her hand back sharply. “You are deceiving yourself! If it is supposed to be yours, it will be yours. No one needs to fall ill or

die for it and you will still get it. If not, it is deceiving! It is a lie! Concubine Yan captured Sheng Chuling and beat Zhenzhu to death. Because of that, Princess Xinnan committed suicide. Do you know that?"

Prince Zhou spoke solemnly, "I know."

Fu Rou asked again, "She pretended to have captured my family and forced me to take poison to commit suicide. Did you know that?"

Prince Zhou froze. "That cannot be! Mother has promised me that she will not take your life!"

Fu Rou took out the poison bottle. "This was left behind by Yu He. I will not lie to you."

Prince Zhou took the medicine bottle and turned it over.

"Concubine Yan is your mother and you are filial to her. But is she really telling you the truth about everything?" From what she saw, Prince Zhou was oblivious about a lot of things. "I am just a female official and my life is not worth a mention. Your Highness can choose not to believe what I just said. But I want to ask you, if Concubine Yan has done something to the Emperor, what would be your choice?"

"Mother treats Imperial Father..." Prince Zhou denied fervently, "It is impossible! Although my mother will do extreme things for my future, she is deeply in love with Imperial Father and will definitely not..."

Fu Rou cut him off, "The Emperor's illness suddenly activated. Following that, Concubine Yan sealed off Ganlou Palace and did not allow Imperial Physician He, who has always been treating the Emperor, to enter. She appointed two Imperial Physicians, Imperial Physician Zhang and Imperial Physician Yang to treat him. Have you never been suspicious about this?"

"When Imperial Father fell ill, Mother needed to control the situation and could only adapt." Prince Zhou resigned himself to being impartial. "I am not a fool. This cannot be evidence to determine that

Mother has done anything to Imperial Father.”

“When His Majesty fell ill, the first thing should be to treat his illness. Why is there a need to change imperial physicians to control the situation?” Fu Rou took out a prescription and handed it over to Prince Zhou. “This was given by Imperial Physician He for His Majesty. He said his medicine is more useful than the ones prescribed by Imperial Physician Zhang and Imperial Physician Yang. Imperial Physician He understands the Emperor’s health best. I trust him.”

Prince Zhou was actually feeling anxious. “You are forcing me to cooperate with you and feed Imperial Father this unknown medicine?”

“Do you really understand Imperial Physician Zhang and Imperial Physician Yang’s medicine?” Fu Rou felt like Prince Zhou was trying to avoid reality. “Moreover, you are in control of the situation now. Who has the ability to force you? There is no point of me holding this prescription. Even if I make it, I can’t give it to the Emperor. Your Highness has it now. As for what to do with it, it is entirely up to you.”

Fu Rou placed the prescription in Prince Zhou’s hands. Prince Zhou closed his fingers over her hands as well as the prescription.

Fu Rou pulled her hands away. “Your Highness should return.”

Prince Zhou’s desire to speak was once again stopped by her. In the end, he left without saying anything.

Tonight, he would kill Sheng Chumu. He was not afraid of killing and had no pity for Sheng Chumu. But if he saw Fu Rou upset, he would feel more pain than her. However, he wanted to be selfish for once. Once he obtained the world, how could he not get the lady he loved? Like what his mother said, they had tolerated for so long. There was no need to tolerate any longer!

Fu Shui’s villa was built on top of a mountain. On the other side of the platform that Lian Yan’er had met Fu Shui, there was a cliff.

Sheng Chumu walked up alone. He saw that Yan Zifang had brought a group of men and was waiting for him humorlessly in formation.

Yan Zifang tilted his lips. "You are quite punctual."

"That's right. An elder brother is like a father. Not being punctual would ruin my reputation." Sheng Chumu had a glib tongue. At the same time, he took out a scroll. "I have what you want. I have written down Prince Qin's location and the way to secretly contact him. It took me two entire days without sleep."

Yan Zifang could not be bothered with his smooth words. "Hand it over."

"Do I look like a fool? If Chuling does not appear in front of me, why would I hand this over to you? I have no patience, if you drag on—" Sheng Chumu shifted the firestick nearer to the scroll. "We shall just cancel this deal. After all, my reputation has long been bad."

Yan Zifang was impatient. "Bring Sheng Chuling out."

All of Sheng Chuling's limbs were bound as he was pushed out by someone. "Elder Brother, this is a trap! Don't try to save me and leave!"

"What's the point in acting brave now? If you are capable, don't let them catch you." Sheng Chumu waved his hand. "Shut up."

Sheng Chuling immediately shut his mouth. He could offend anyone but he could not offend his elder brother.

"Yan Zifang, let him go first." Seeing Yan Zifang was about to speak, Sheng Chumu cut him off. "You brought so many people and there are only two of us. Don't be a coward."

Yan Zifang had always been proud. He could not stand being looked down by Sheng Chumu. Once he made arrangements, he agreed to release Sheng Chuling.

Sheng Chuling walked to the middle of both of them and Sheng Chumu automatically threw the scroll over. As soon as Yan Zifang opened the scroll, Sheng Chumu threw the firestick he was holding as

well.

Although it was obvious that Sheng Chumu had missed, the scroll suddenly caught on fire. Yan Zifang realised that there were traces of fire powder on the scroll and quickly threw it away. He watched it burn to ashes. At the same time, he heard a loud sound behind him. He turned back to look and had yet to figure out what was going on when he saw Sheng Chumu pull Sheng Chuling and rush to the side of the cliff.

“Grab the rope. Go!” Sheng Chumu shouted.

Yan Zifang had a sudden realisation and grabbed a firestick from his subordinate and threw it forward. The light from the fire clearly illuminated a line suspended in midair. Sheng Chumu had made preparations. A steel arrow had been shot from the opposite mountain and formed a link with the rope.

Yan Zifang shouted, “Catch them!”

Sheng Chumu stayed behind and fought with Yan Zifang’s troops that surrounded him. Sheng Chuling was being brought away by the rope and turned back. “Elder Brother, let’s go!”

Sheng Chumu finally managed to get Yan Zifang’s men to retreat slightly. He turned back to grab the rope. Unexpectedly, an arrow shot and pierced his back. Because of the sudden pain, he missed the rope and fell down the cliff.

“Elder Brother--” Sheng Chuling was horrified but he was moving further and further away. He was slowly engulfed in darkness.

Fu Shui held onto a bow and walked out of the darkness. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Yan Zifang. They both gazed out to the bottomless abyss.

Sheng Chuling’s miserable cry echoed for a long time.

Prince Qin and Xiao Lu were sitting at the same table. Their heads were down as they tore at their food. They played for the entire

morning, looking for new things and were starving.

“Eat slowly.” A pair of chopsticks picked up a huge amount of meat and placed it in Prince Qin’s bowl. Madam Sheng was smiling. “I personally marinated this dried meat. Chujian really likes...” She suddenly stopped talking. She then raised her spirits. The dining table was also vibrant with children around.

Seeing the way the two of them ate, Madam Sheng recalled when Chumu and his brothers were still young. At that time, all four children sat around the huge table. Every meal was like a war and caused her to have headaches. However, now as she thought back, she felt like that was the happiest time. Her eldest daughter and her youngest son were gone. A parent sending off their children. Although she was not going to cry now, her heart hurt.

Prince Qin suddenly placed his chopsticks down.

“Your Highness, why aren’t you eating?” Madam Sheng was concerned.

“Is Sister Xinnan...really dead?” Although Duke Lu Residence looked peaceful, they were actually keeping a tight watch on the palace. News spread to them very fast. Prince Qin was young but he was sensitive.

Madam Sheng’s eyes were kind as she kept quiet.

Prince Qin believed that she was silently agreeing and was upset. He changed the topic, “Does Imperial Father not want me anymore?”

Fu Rou did not want Prince Qin to worry so she did not tell him the details. She only said that the Emperor was ill and Prince Zhou was in control. He should stay in Duke Lu Residence for a few days. When the situation in the palace was clear, she would fetch him back to the palace.

Madam Sheng did not know how to explain that at this very moment, the palace was full of traps and everyone was in danger.

“The Emperor dotes on you the most. Court Lady Fu said that while the Emperor is sick, we should stay at Duke Lu Residence. Your

Highness just has to pray for the Emperor every day. The Emperor will then recover and call you back.” Xiao Lu was candid and Prince Qin cheered up.

All of a sudden, the housekeeper rushed in frantically. He said that the imperial guards had arrived at Duke Lu Residence.

“Why are you panicking!” Madam Sheng slammed the table and stood up, a heroic look on her face. Her gaze was calm and confident. “Xiao Lu, bring Prince Qin to hide at the place I showed you before.” *She was prepared for this day to come!*

Xiao Lu pulled Prince Qin away.

Madam Sheng instructed the housekeeper, “Go and ask everyone to gather at the main hall!”

The housekeeper left. Madam Sheng returned to her room, she had to prepare.

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Zhong Yutang led a huge group of people to Duke Lu Residence. Since they could not find Prince Qin in the palace, there was only one other possibility. Fu Rou did not bring Prince Qin back to begin with. And there was only one place outside of the palace that could safely hold Prince Qin. It was here!

The shops along the street near Duke Lu Residence have been watched over by Duke Lu Residence. When they saw this aggressive group, they were all deeply concerned and came up to see what was going on.

Zhong Yutang waved his hand. "Knock the door!"

His subordinates immediately ran forward. Their palms had yet to hit the door when the door opened by itself.

Two rows of white-haired servants, made up of men and women, walked out with their heads up high and chests stuck out. The last two servants carried the grand chair and placed it in the middle of the formation. Madam Sheng wore a Lady Gaoming Court Attire. She held a long pole and a broadsword in her hands. She sat in the grand chair with a startling aura.

Zhong Yutang was momentarily stunned. However, he remembered that he had Prince Zhou and Concubine Yan supporting him and immediately stood straight. "I came today on Prince Zhou's orders to

search for an escapee. Madam Sheng, you are a first grade Lady Gaoming, you should understand your duties and cooperate with me.”

Madam Sheng made an *oh* sound, “Back then, when I followed the Duke to fight wars all around the country, I could recognise quite a number of generals. Now in peacetime, I have been enjoying the peace in my home and don’t know a lot of junior generals. May I know your name?”

Zhong Yutang’s rank was lower than Madam Sheng and he had to be polite. “I am the Imperial Guard Commander, Zhong Yutang.”

Madam Sheng seemed to recall something. “I do know someone else with the surname Zhong. He is called Zhong Yuman. He was the Duke’s soldier and was later promoted to become a military official at Ji City. It is a pity that he died from illness at a young age.”

Zhong Yutang chuckled blandly, “Zhong Yuman was an elder brother of my clan.”

“There is another one with the surname Zhong. Back then when the Duke was fighting in battles, he was fighting alongside as well. He wields a long spear well. Unfortunately, he got shot by a shower of arrows. When he was buried, the Duke personally placed the long spear in his coffin...”

Zhong Yutang’s expression froze. “He was my uncle.”

Madam Sheng looked astonished before expressing delight, “Oh you are one of us then! We have to treat you well!”

As soon as she finished her sentence, someone carried a table and chair out and placed fruits as well as snacks on it. They even brought out a jar of wine.

It was only then that Zhong Yutang had a chance to speak, “This...Madam, you don’t have to be courteous, I came today--”

Madam Sheng suddenly stood up. “General Zhong is on duty and it is not convenient to drink. However, we have already brought out this good jar of wine from the Duke. We can’t leave it untouched. Today,

let me invite a protector of Great Tang to drink. If anyone present believes that they are worthy of a drink, come and drink.”

A one-eyed white-haired house servant stepped out. “I fought at Jiande County with the Duke and an enemy shot one of my eyes. However, I did not retreat but continued to fight into the enemy camp. After asking myself, I believe I can drink a cup of the Duke’s wine.”

Another house servant pulled open his top and exposed a mottled scar. “This is a scar gotten for Great Tang. I can drink the Duke’s good wine as well!”

More and more servants came up to talk about their courageous past. They all walked forward to pour and drink the wine.

The old female servants stepped up for their husbands and sons who sacrificed their lives for Great Tang. They offered the wine and poured it on the ground, toasting their spirits.

The entire street was moved as they watched the scene and they cheered them on. Zhong Yutang felt extremely pressured but he gritted his teeth, not giving in. “Madam Sheng, the wine has been drunk and past relationships have been told. Can I continue on my duties now?”

Madam Sheng was composed. “General Zhong, what do you have to do?”

Zhong Yutang was patient. “I have been tasked to search Duke Lu Residence and capture the escapee, Sheng Chuling. Whoever dares to interfere will be considered going against the court!”

Madam Sheng sat back down on the Imperial Tutor’s chair. “I will momentarily not pursue the matter on what crime Chuling committed. I believe that the court has their own laws to punish those that committed a crime and ensure that the innocent is not wrongfully committed. If you want to search, you can go ahead.”

Zhong Yutang’s eyes lit up. “Thank you for your understanding.” He lifted his hand to signal the start of the search.

“But, you will have to wait for me to die before you can search!”
Madam Sheng reached back and held the long sword in front of her. The sword reflected the midday sun and was blinding.

Zhong Yutang’s eyes hardened. “Madam, you are...”

Madam Sheng declared loudly, “Duke Lu has helped Great Tang fight wars for tens of years and all that is left is a body of scars and old injuries. My oldest daughter married Prince Han and was poisoned. In order to pledge his loyalty to the Emperor, my third son died during the rebellion in the Eastern Palace. My eldest son, Sheng Chumu, almost lost his life pacifying the rebellion. The Emperor then made him the general of the Hundred Army. However, he went missing for no reason last night! I have been waiting and waiting for any news of him. I did not receive any news of him and instead was informed that Princess Xinnan has died and my second son, Chuling, has turned into an escapee. Now, a bunch of impressive looking juniors are trying to force your way into my house! You want to search my residence? Sure. After all, I only have my old life left. If you can step over my body, you can go ahead and search!”

The group of old servants shouted, “Step over our dead bodies!”

Zhong Yutang’s embarrassment turned to anger. “The imperial guards are acting on the court’s orders. How can old things like you people stop us? Attack them!”

All of a sudden, an egg flew through the air and smashed into Zhong Yutang’s head. The split egg flowed down his face.

Zhong Yutang turned back to glare at the street. “Who threw that?”

The people on the street were all expressionless and no one answered. In the next moment, they all exploded and started to throw rotten eggs, spoiled vegetables and mud.

Zhong Yutang opened his mouth, wanting to vent but ended up with a mouthful of mud.

“Injuring loyal and honest people. You are despicable and vile!”

“Duke Lu Residence is made up of martyrs. Get lost, you scoundrel!”

“Get lost! Get lost! Get lost!”

The crowd was furious! Zhong Yutang looked a sorry figure as he could not even lift his head. He was afraid of triggering a mass revolt and could only retreat with his tail between his legs.

The crowd and the servants all cheered.

Madam Sheng silently breathed a sigh of relief. A small smile on her face. She looked at how enthusiastic all these old but good people were. All of a sudden, she noticed Fang Xuanling, dressed in commoner clothes, silently standing in the crowd. He wore a comforted expression and nodded a greeting to her. She nodded back slightly.

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Prince Zhou stood in front of Fu Rou's room, slightly hesitant. He had just received the news that Sheng Chumu had been shot and fell off a cliff. It was basically a death notice. As soon as he thought of how heartbroken Fu Rou would be when she heard this news, he felt extremely guilty. At the same time, there was a hint of delight within him, for obtaining the woman he loved for himself.

He took a deep breath and pushed open the door.

Fu Rou's long hair was loose as she sat on the bed. Her eyes were red. As soon as she caught sight of Prince Zhou, her expression became stony. Prince Zhou's heart fell as he pretended to be calm. "How are you feeling today?"

Fu Rou remained silent as her hands slowly clenched into fists. "Please get out, Your Highness!"

Prince Zhou sat down. "What is wrong?"

Fu Rou's eyes were filled with pain. "So you are such a frightening person? A knife hidden beneath your smile, a needle hidden in silk. You can take the life of a good person without making a sound."

Prince Zhou suddenly grabbed her fist. Fu Rou was not willing to be weak as she revealed her palm. In her palm, there was a fragrance pouch, stained with blood.

"I had personally sewn this for Chumu. Just now, this appeared outside my door." Fu Rou bit her lip. When she spoke, her voice was laced with thick resentment and anger, "What did you all do to Chumu?"

"..." Prince Zhou hesitated slightly, "I don't know."

"You really don't know how to lie. Chumu got into an accident and you say you don't know. Imperial Physician He is dead and you don't know either. I only gave you Imperial Physician He's prescription for the Emperor and in the next moment, he drowned and lost his life! I trusted you but I will not be so gullible anymore!"

Fu Rou pointed at the door. "Get lost!"

Prince Zhou stood up and walked out in a daze. He has never seen Fu Rou so angry before. He thought that even if she resented him after knowing the truth, he would be able to take it. However, when faced with the truth, he realised how difficult it was to bear. His heart felt like it was cut with a knife. Moreover, he was betrayed by his own mother.

Fu Shui told him that Yan Zifang had reported the completion of the mission to his mother and submitted the proof of Sheng Chumu's death to his mother. Therefore, only his mother could have sent someone to place the fragrance pouch.

Why? Prince Zhou could not understand. His mother clearly promised him that she would not hurt Fu Rou and would let him get his wishes. But what she did simply caused what little chance he had to disappear completely.

And Imperial Physician He. He had asked his mother to let Imperial Physician He treat his Imperial Father. His mother had also promised him. But now, Imperial Physician He was dead! No wonder Fu Rou was angry. Even he could not help but be sure that it was his mother's doing.

His mother did this to prevent Imperial Physician He from treating his Imperial Father. However, by doing this, she made matters more conspicuous. There was something amiss about his Imperial Father's

illness. Prince Zhou took out the prescription Fu Rou had given him from his sleeve. At that time, he thought that there was no need to hand it over to his mother. After all, it was a prescription that Imperial Physician He created himself. Now that Imperial Physician He was no longer around, he became the only person that knows the prescription.

Prince Zhou fell silent for a while before placing the prescription back into his robe. Now, there was only one thing he could do.

Outside Ganlou Palace, Prince Zhou silently stayed in a hidden corner.

An internal attendant carried a tray with a medicine bowl on it. He arrived at the palace's door.

Prince Zhou had awaited his prey. He confidently walked out and pretended it was a coincidence. "Is this for Imperial Father?"

The internal attendant was not at all suspicious. "Yes"

"Give it to me, you can go." Prince Zhou took the medicine.

The internal attendant turned and walked down the stairs.

With no one around, Prince Zhou turned and headed back to the corner. Another person came out of the shadow. This was his confidante. He held an identical bowl in his hands and swapped it with the bowl on the tray. He then left swiftly but silently.

Prince Zhou's expression did not change as he entered the hall. He fed his Imperial Father the medicine.

When Concubine Yan and Yu He came, the bowl in Prince Zhou's hands were already empty. Prince Zhou smiled, "It is always Mother that feeds Imperial Father his medicine. I should do my filial duties as well."

Concubine Yan was not suspicious of him. "You are a filial child. Your father and I have always known it."

Prince Zhou got up. "I still have submissions to go through, I will come back later to accompany Imperial Father."

Concubine Yan's voice was gentle. "Go ahead."

After Prince Zhou left, Concubine Yan's expression became sharp. "Has Zhong Yutang gone to Duke Lu's Residence?"

Yu He replied, "Yes."

"I hope he completes his task well. Then he will not disappoint me after I rotated him back to Chang'an." Concubine Yan sighed.

Yu He was about to say something when an internal attendant came in to report that Fang Xuanling was requesting to see the Emperor.

Concubine Yan frowned, "Tell him that the Emperor is the same as before."

Yu He pondered, "We have already said this many times. How about we let him in to have a look. We will prevent the officials from talking about it as well."

Concubine Yan thought about it. "Okay." She ordered the internal attendant to call him in.

All of a sudden, Concubine Yan caught a glimpse of the Emperor's eyelids twitching. His eyes slowly opened.

Yu He was stunned. "Your Highness..."

The Emperor's eyes were wide open. His gaze was slackened and he could not focus. However, Concubine Yan and Yu He were shocked. At this very moment, Fang Xuanling had arrived at the door.

Yu He muttered, "The ring."

Concubine Yan shook her head, she did not prepare it today. Yu He gritted his teeth and stretched out to cover the Emperor's mouth and nose.

Concubine Yan was shocked but she quickly reacted and pulled Yu

He's hand away. "No, I can't do it..."

Yu He used more strength. Concubine Yan lowered her voice and spoke angrily, "Aren't you going to let go?"

Yu He did not say anything but his eyes showed his unwillingness.

The Emperor could not breath. However, the pain of suffocation caused a spark to appear in his eyes and his ability to fight death appeared. He grabbed onto Concubine Yan's sleeve.

Concubine Yan almost cried. *She wanted the position of Grand Empress, she wanted her son to become the Emperor. However, deep in her heart, what she yearned for the most was to follow her heart and grow old with him. It was so simple but she had to use all ways and means just because the person she loved was the Emperor. She had the whole harem to fight.*

What do you think will happen to Concubine Yan in the end?

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Through the screen, there was turmoil in Concubine Yan's eyes as she saw Fang Xuanling slowly coming closer. As she looked at the Emperor's reddened face, bulging eyes and the hand that was gripping her sleeve tightly, she suddenly used all her might to pull Yu He's hands off and push him away.

She could not do it! She has told an uncountable number of lies. Only her love for the Emperor was a hundred percent real!

Fang Xuanling appeared from beside the screen and saw Yu He on the ground. He stared at Concubine Yan in astonishment. Moreover, Concubine Yan was panting and her expression was one of panic. He found it strange until his eyes landed on the Emperor's face and saw that his eyes were open.

"Your Majesty!" Fang Xuanling was delighted as he fell to a kneel in front of the bed.

Concubine Yan silently breathed a sigh of relief. She looked graceful as she silently neatened her hair and clothes. Her voice was light, "That's right. His Majesty is finally awake. Look, His Majesty is still holding onto my sleeve." She held the Emperor's hand. "Your Majesty, Minister Fang is here."

The Emperor could not breathe just now, but now, he opened his mouth and took a deep breath. It used up the rest of his energy as his

eyes slackened once again.

Fang Xuanling thought the Emperor wanted to say something and moved his ear next to the Emperor's mouth. "What did you say, Your Majesty?"

Concubine Yan threw Yu He, who was sprawled on the ground, a look. When Yu He saw her gaze, he silently crawled up and took a thin rope from his sleeve. He moved closer to Fang Xuanling.

Fang Xuanling was completely unguarded. "Your Majesty, speak louder. I can't hear you. Your Majesty? Your Majesty?"

The Emperor closed his eyes and stopped responding.

Fang Xuanling sighed as he stood up and turned around. He saw Yu He walk past, with his hands clasped behind his back, to stand behind Concubine Yan. He did not find anything strange. "His Majesty's illness..."

Concubine Yan looked patient. "Minister Fang, you should think positively. It is already great news that His Majesty could wake up for a moment today."

Fang Xuanling nodded. "Yes, yes, I should think positively. I will not disturb His Majesty any longer. I will take my leave."

Concubine Yan looked on coldly as Fang Xuanling left. She then turned around to grab Yu He's collar. She clenched her fist and tried her best to suppress her anger.

"You...very good! You treat my words like nothing!"

"Sister....." It was difficult for Yu He to speak when his collar was being pulled. "It is all for Great Sui."

Concubine Yan's expression froze as she released her hand and pushed him away. "Get lost!"

"Sister, do you really think that after Prince Zhou ascends the throne and the Emperor wakes up, he will still love you and be with you happily when he realises he is no longer the Emperor? Think about it.

Before the Grand Emperor died, did he forgive the Emperor?" Yu He was speaking for her good. "At this very moment, we cannot be foolish, we have to weigh what is important."

Concubine Yan gritted her teeth. "No matter what His Majesty thinks, I will accompany him and get through it."

Yu He turned to leave. He saw Chief Cao standing by the door. It seemed like he had been standing there for a long time.

Chief Cao's tone was calm. "Chief Yu, is everything okay?" It was obvious that he had seen everything.

Yu He's eyebrows grew together, with a wave of resentment over him.

All kinds of flowers were blooming beautifully in the Imperial Garden but there was not a single soul around. Ever since Concubine Yan took charge of managing the Six Offices, she readily hurt or killed people. All the concubines were afraid to be her next target and they all tried to move about as little as possible.

All of a sudden, Yan Zifang appeared at the entrance. Behind him, a person, who looked like a scholar, was dressed in a gray gown with a green cloth on his head. Both of them walked quickly through the garden. The scholar lifted his head slightly, curiously looking at the unique flowers and plants around him, reverence in his eyes.

"Yan Zifang." Fu Rou was about to head to the Imperial Guards Office to find him.

Yan Zifang stopped walking and turned towards her. His tone was stoic. "You called me by my name. Is this the etiquette of a female official from the Six Offices?"

Fu Rou took out a bloodied fragrance pouch. "I want to know news about him."

"Why would you want to upset yourself? Do you know what it means to hurt the heart?" Yan Zifang pointed to his own heart. "He got shot

here. Even deities will find it difficult to save him. You should give up.” He turned to leave as soon as he spoke.

Fu Rou grabbed the fragrance pouch tightly. She did not believe a single word Yan Zifang said. Chumu was extremely skilled and was good with strategy. How could he have been shot? At the same time, her gaze fell on the scholar’s back.

Yan Zifang and Zhong Yutang were both selected by Prince Zhou and it goes without saying that they both gained Concubine Yan’s trust. That meant that Yan Zifang was working for Concubine Yan. The person that looked like a scholar was neither an internal attendant nor a guard. He was also not a military official. Since he appeared in the harem, it was obvious that Concubine Yan needed to use him.

But for what? Fu Rou thought about it as she left the Imperial Garden. As she walked through the long corridor, she arrived at a desolated courtyard. She pushed open the door to enter a room.

A voice floated out.

“The Empress has passed on and the Emperor is ill. I am old and will soon have no use. No one has any ability to go against them.” It was Wei Song’s voice.

“Stop nagging. You should rest and heal.”

Fu Rou remembered this voice.

It was Attendant Huang. He was once highly regarded by the Emperor and was on a similar rank as Chief Cao. However, in the past year, Chief Cao had the advantage and Attendant Huang did not get a chance to meet the Emperor.

Fu Rou walked in.

Attendant Huang stood up. “Court Lady Fu, you are here. I will leave first as I have things to do.”

“Attendant Huang.” She had wanted to ask Wei Song to give her ideas. “I did not expect you to come and visit Chief Wei.”

“Sigh, I sympathise with someone in a similar position of distress.” Attendant Huang chuckled bitterly. “Back then, the both of us did not interact much. But in this palace, who can predict their own outcome?”

Wei Song saw Fu Rou’s expression and sort of understood. “Brother, has things not been going well in the Internal Attendant Department?”

Attendant Huang sighed, “How can it be? I am basically like a grandchild to Cao Yangde.”

Fu Rou continued, “Chief Cao has recently been going to Concubine Yan’s palace often and seems to have gained Concubine Yan’s trust. He is watching over Ganlou Palace tightly for her. It is as if they are hiding some dark secret inside. Attendant Huang, have you seen or know anything?”

“I can’t go near either. Cao Yangde ah, he is even more proud with Concubine Yan backing him than when the Emperor backs him. Recently, he even reprimanded me. He doesn’t even know how to be human.” Because he was feeling down, he thought of coming to see Wei Song to comfort himself.

Wei Song made an *oh* sound. “Amongst the seniors in the Internal Attendant Department, only you are able to do anything to him. The Emperor has always looked upon you highly and Cao Yangde has only recently served the Emperor closely.”

Attendant Huang could sense it easily. “Very good, Chief Cao. Are you trying to ruin our relationship?”

Fu Rou said, “Chief Wei and I are just speaking the truth. It is a pity that recently, the days have been harder. Attendant Huang, don’t you feel the same?”

Attendant Huang’s voice faltered, “I am not stupid. I do not dare to involve myself in your issues.” He would not place his head on the line.

Fu Rou smiled, “You don’t have to be involved. If you see a new face,

just help to take notice.”

“Don’t think about it.” Attendant Huang walked out.

Fu Rou could hear the determination in his voice and sighed lightly.

Wei Song coughed twice. He sounded weak yet steady. “Court Lady Fu, do not be anxious. An old hand knows the ropes. He is someone with a lot of experience in the palace. He knows what is good and bad.”

Fu Rou was still considered young and she did not really believe him. Unexpectedly, someone knocked on her door that very night. She opened the door only to see Attendant Huang. At that very moment, she was full with admiration for Wei Song. This was wisdom that came with experience.

“Attendant Huang?” She did not show any of the emotions she was feeling. “It is very late. Is there something wrong?”

Attendant Huang threw a nervous glance over his shoulder before stepping into her room. When he closed the door, he looked around once more.

Fu Rou was secretly delighted. She was going to receive great news.

“This time I am done because of you!” Attendant Huang immediately complained.

Fu Rou wanted to argue back. After all, when she made the suggestion, he outrightly rejected her. However, she chose to tolerate it. This was not the time to be stubborn.

“Why?” Her voice was calm.

“There was a new face in the Imperial Library. I saw that he was behaving suspiciously with Cao Yangde and thought of what you said. Therefore, I snuck a look.” Attendant Huang took out two pieces of paper, a horrified expression on his face. “Look for yourself! Bless my life!”

Fu Rou took it to have a look. Her eyebrows slowly furrowed as her

gaze slowly became clear. On the paper, it was written that the Emperor agreed that he was getting older and his health could no longer bear the heavy burden. He was willing to spend his later days at the Grand Emperor. He will be succeeded by his third son, Li Ge.

“This...” *This was an imperial order for succession of the throne?*

Attendant Huang looked miserable. “Court lady Fu, you are right...” A lot of courage was needed to say those words. “They are going to seize the throne!”

It is not possible for an imperial order for succession to be written on paper. Moreover, the words were weird looking. Some of the words looked as if they were written by the Emperor whereas others do not. Fu Rou suddenly thought of the scholar covered in a green cloth and everything became clear.

“Concubine Yan found someone to copy the Emperor’s handwriting?”

Attendant Huang snorted, “What else?”

Fu Rou’s expression turned serious.

“What should we do?” It was Attendant Huang’s turn to urge her.

“...” Fu Rou fell silent for a moment. “Looking at the words, they have yet to replicate his handwriting exactly. Moreover, the imperial decree for succession must abide by the law. There is still one important thing. Maybe there is still a chance to stop Concubine Yan and Chief Cao’s scheme.”

Attendant Huang understood as well. “The Emperor’s Seal!”

Court Lady

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Peace did not last for many days in the palace before the dark wave surged violently once again.

Yu He and Zhong Yutang brought the imperial guard army to search everywhere. They said that Fu Rou had an ulterior motive and was impolite to Concubine Yan and they were capturing her for her crime. The people in the Six Offices were frantic. No one knew that it was Fu Rou that took away the Emperor's Seal and caused Concubine Yan to be unable to place the seal on the imperial decree that she worked so hard to fabricate. Moreover, Prince Zhou's request for all the ministers and officials to gather had already been sent out. It will be extremely disgraceful if they could not produce the imperial order for succession by then. Hence, Concubine Yan could not care anymore and openly looked for her.

Fu Rou hid in a desolated garden. The good thing about being a court lady was that she knew the Royal Palace like the back of her hand. Imperial Physician He had recently drowned in this place and Concubine Yan had instructed for the garden to be locked up. She would not guess that Fu Rou would dare to hide here. Fu Rou looked down to see the small pouch that she was gripping tightly. She could not help but laugh bitterly. She never thought that there would be a day where she would be able to touch the Emperor's Seal.

This thing was really so heavy, it made her frantic. However, Yu

Minchen, who was in charge of guarding the Emperor's Seal, had said that he could not make a move or it would alert their opponents. The only thing that he could do was to hand it over to her. He would try his best to help her as much as he could. She was startled as she thought that he would not believe her. After all, Concubine Yan was now in control of the internal palace. Even the imperial guards were under her control. Unexpectedly, Yu Minchen said that before the Emperor fell sick, he had sent out an imperial decree to suppress Prince Zhou. However, Chief Cao had intercepted and taken it away saying that the Emperor had changed his mind. From that moment, he started to suspect that there was something going on with Chief Cao. It was then that Fu Rou found out that Yu Minchen was an agent that Empress Zhangsun had put in place.

All of a sudden, there were murmurs.

Fu Rou silently walked to the back of the garden's door. She peered out through a crack. She saw quite a number of guards run in a particular direction. She made a guess as to where they were going and her expression changed. It was Concubine Qiao's palace. She knew that things were bad.

As Concubine Qiao saw the imperial guards search the entire palace, she was fearful. What she feared came through as she saw several guards rush into her palace to search.

"Why are you all searching even my bedroom?" She tried her best to look angry.

"We are acting on Concubine Yan and General Zhong's orders. We cannot leave any place left unsearched." One guard remained persistent.

"I am His Majesty's concubine and my bedroom is where His Majesty and I sleep. Who are you to barge in? Aren't you all afraid of blaspheming the Emperor?" Concubine Qiao refused to let them through.

"What are you all standing around for?" Yu He walked in.

Concubine Qiao froze before putting on an amicable and friendly

expression, “Chief Yu, you came just in time. These imperial guards do not know their place....”

“Concubine Qiao, you are a close sister to Concubine Yan. Since Fu Rou offended Concubine Yan, you should be leading the cooperation. You won’t be going against her right?” Yu He sneered.

“This...” Concubine Qiao’s face froze, “Of course not...”

Yu He tilted his chin at the imperial guards. The imperial guards rushed in and searched the cabinets.

Concubine Qiao was slightly anxious and Yu He could tell. “Your Highness, please rest assured. We won’t damage anything. They look clumsy but are actually very meticulous.”

Concubine Qiao forced a smile but continued staring at them. She saw one of the guards move to the bed and bend down to knock the wooden frame. He gave a suspicious look and continued to knock it a few more times.

Yu He noticed, “What is the matter?”

Concubine Qiao’s expression was frantic. She was panicking internally and did not dare to continue looking. She averted her gaze.

“Court Lady Fu!” She blurted out. Yu He immediately turned around. “Where?”

Concubine Qiao pointed at the main gate. “There!”

Yu He looked over and saw Fu Rou standing outside the door, looking around. As soon as their gazes locked, she turned and ran.

Yu He shouted and ran, “Stop searching, hurry and chase her!”

All the imperial guards ran out and followed Yu He on the chase.

Concubine Qiao breathed a huge sigh of relief. She walked into the bedroom and closed the door. When she reached her bed, she opened the wooden frame.

“It is alright. You can come out.”

A person came out from under the bed. She had round eyes and a face like cotton wool. It was Princess Xinnan. Fu Rou had given her the pill to fake her death and she managed to escape from Concubine Yan. After that, Xinnan had been staying in Concubine Qiao's palace. Concubine Qiao had been convinced by Li Baolin. If Concubine Yan were to become the Empress, no one would be able to live well. She agreed to take in Xinnan out of consideration for her own daughter.

“It is alright?” Xinnan had been frightened to death.

“They were trying to catch Court Lady Fu. But she knew that you were here and purposely exposed herself to draw away their attention.” Concubine Qiao's guess was accurate.

“As expected of Court Lady Fu, my Sister-in-law--” Xinnan sighed. She suddenly refocused. “They are looking for her and she exposed herself to save me. Then...”

Concubine Qiao nodded. There was nothing they could do.

Ultimately, Fu Rou could not escape the imperial guards' pursuit and was brought to Concubine Yan. Luckily, she had hidden the Emperor's Seal before things happened. Concubine Yan could not get her to talk and ordered Yu He to capture all the female officials from the Six Offices. If Fu Rou remained silent, she would start to kill the female officials.

Fu Rou was temporarily locked in a storage room. The door was locked and she could not escape through the small ventilation window. She was feeling anxious.

There was a sound of a bird call. Yang Bo's face appeared through the window.

Fu Rou was delighted, “Yang Bo!”

“I heard that you got captured and found a way to sneak in.” Yang Bo looked worried, “You ah. If you had just taken the pill to fake your death, you could have been living freely outside the palace now. Why are you still going against Concubine Yan?”

“There are some things that must be done.” Fu Rou knew that if she escaped her responsibility, she would not be able to escape the guilt. “Yang Bo, help me do something.”

“What do you need help with?”

“Concubine Yan and her group have forged an imperial decree for succession. All that is missing is the Emperor’s Seal. Prince Zhou has already called for all the ministers to gather and they are all waiting in the main palace. Think of a way to make the hundreds of officials expose them.”

Yang Bo trembled, “I will not get involved! When it comes to these kinds of things, a small mistake will lead to a horrible death. It is better if I remain out of it.”

Fu Rou spoke meaningfully, “Once their conspiracy succeeds, Great Tang will crash and the golden age will turn into a world of chaos. Not a single Great Tang citizen will be spared. If you stand out, you will be able to move the world and save the country. Yang Bo, ask yourself. Isn’t this the extremely rare chance that you have been waiting for?”

Yang Bo started to hesitate, “Even if I go to the main hall, will those ministers know who I am? I don’t have any proof. They won’t believe me.”

“You have proof.” Fu Rou believed in Yang Bo. “The Emperor’s Seal is in my hands. As long as you take the Emperor’s Seal and tell the ministers that this was personally handed over to you by the official guarding the Emperor’s Seal, even if they do not trust you, they will have suspicions. As soon as they suspect something, they will investigate. This will be our chance to turn things around.”

Yang Bo asked, “Where is the Emperor’s Seal?”

Fu Rou lowered her voice and solemnly entrusted the task over to him. “It is buried under an old pomegranate tree by the pavilion next to the lake. Yang Bo, I am counting on you.”

Yang Bo repeated, “The old pomegranate tree next to the pavilion by

the lake.”

Fu Rou was not suspicious of him. “Yes.”

Yang Bo suddenly tilted his head and shouted, “The Emperor’s Seal is hidden under the old pomegranate tree by the pavilion next to the lake!”

Chief Cao smiled as he appeared at the window. “Yang Bo, you have done well. From today on, you will enjoy wealth and rank.”

Fu Rou was shocked. Her eyes reflected disbelief. “Yang Bo, you...”

Yang Bo cut her off, “Do you still remember my good brother, Yang Hou? Because he helped the palace maid, Li Chun’er, bring arsenic to kill rats in the palace, he was beaten to death by Empress Zhangsun. A person’s life is not even worth rats. I swore to avenge him. The best revenge against Zhangsun is to help Prince Zhou ascend the throne and forever be above Zhangsun’s sons.”

Fu Rou’s eyes were filled with pain. “You are willing to throw away the citizens’ future just for revenge?”

Yang Bo spoke, “No. It is like you said. I want to do something huge. I want to save Great Sui, which has been forgotten by people and become the hero of Great Sui.”

Fu Rou felt pathetic. “Do you know how the brutal Sui Court tyrannized the citizens? Do you know how many people have died far away from their homes because of the forced heavy labour? Because of your personal revenge, your personal gains, you caused hundreds of thousands of people to suffer what happened in the past all over again?”

Chief Cao turned to leave. “Why do you need to bother talking to her? Yang Bo, let’s go!”

Yang Bo paused for a while and ultimately forced himself to say, “The world is so big and has nothing to do with me. I am a practical person. I will be good to whoever treats me well. I will take revenge on anyone that has maltreated me. Court Lady Fu, you have always been good to me. This time, I have wronged you. When I succeed, I

will repay you.”

Fu Rou's eyes widened as she saw Yang Bo leave with Chief Cao. She slid down the wall in disappointment and hugged her knees. *She thought that as long as she was true to others, she would be able to gain their sincerity in return. However, ultimately, she could not win over people's desires. A human's heart was hard to comprehend. She had overestimated herself.*

She did not know how long she sat for. *Bom bom bom!* Someone was knocking on the window!

Fu Rou looked up. She never expected it to be Attendant Huang.

“Have you sided with Concubine Yan as well?” *She was too foolish. This was Concubine Yan's palace. How could Yang Bo have found a way in?*

“Even if I want to, would Chief Cao let me? I have always been a thorn in his eye. If I gain power, won't he come for my life? Now, I can only hang on this unreliable tree of yours. Fu Rou, you can't quit now. Empress Wende looked upon you so highly. She was hoping for you to save everyone.”

She laughed bitterly when she heard this. “They have already taken the Emperor's Seal away. What else can I do?”

“With effort, one can achieve anything. There is no battle that is guaranteed to fail.” Attendant Huang had been forced to be anxious.

This phrase echoed in Fu Rou's heart. She suddenly remembered Chumu telling her something similar. *When the battle was not in your favour, one had to make the best use of everything they got. In this palace, Concubine Yan and Prince Zhou's true opposition was not her and Attendant Huang.*

I did not expect Yang Bo to betray Fu Rou...

Remember how all those poor servants died in the past? It seemed like it wasn't significant, but it matters. Karma...

Also, what do you think Fu Rou's plan is?

Court Lady

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The river flowed continuously. Suddenly, numerous dots of lights appeared and two heads could be seen. One was Sheng Chumu and the other was Sheng Chuling. Sheng Chuling spat out a mouthful of water and was about to cough when his elder brother covered his mouth.

“Keep quiet!” Sheng Chumu looked at the forest in front of them. He could vaguely make out the tents of the Hundred Army. He was secretly rejoicing that the general that replaced him did not change the location.

Sheng Chuling grumbled, “It is so far, who would hear us? Moreover, my Xinnan is not a fish, why did you bring me underwater for?”

There were so many miracles that happened this year. His elder brother had resurrected for the second time and returned home in great spirits. Following that, Sheng Chumu told him that Xinnan did not die but only pretended to be dead and was currently hiding in the palace with Fu Rou’s help. She was still safe. As soon as he heard this, Chuling’s spirits raised greatly. He intended to follow his elder brother to sneak into the palace and save his wife. But, this place did not look like the palace.

“Chang’an’s commander has been changed and no one can be trusted. Minister Fang and the other ministers have all been summoned to the

palace and this is the only place where we can get help.” Sheng Chumu did not wait for his younger brother to speak. “The Restricted Area has the Wei River in the north, Chang’an in the west, the Royal Palace in the South and the Chan River in the East. It is a crucial point in military affairs. Why do you think the Emperor would let me train the Hundred Army in the Restricted Area?”

Sheng Chuling thought about it and was astonished, “Could it be that the Emperor suspected that a day like this would come and decided to prepare first? But you only have a hundred men under you, can you really reverse things?”

Sheng Chumu laughed proudly, “Well, we will have to try to find out!” As he spoke, he pushed himself onto shore and silently ran into the forest.

Ye Qiulang and Zong Jianxiu led the Hundred Army through the forest. They managed not to alert the new commander. Very soon, they gathered by the river. Sheng Chumu walked out and Sheng Chuling followed him. Everyone was emotional as they cupped their fists and greeted him. They all lowered their voices and shouted, “General.”

Sheng Chumu smiled, revealing his white teeth. “Did you all miss me?”

Zong Jianxiu grinned, “Of course. Brother Ye missed you more than his Yan’er.”

Ye Qiulang elbowed Zong Jianxiu. “General, you are finally back. We have waited a long time for you.”

Sheng Chumu turned serious. “Skills are not learned in a day. Did you all degrade?”

Ye Qiulang and Zong Jianxiu replied simultaneously, “Of course not.”

“Very good.” Sheng Chumu nodded. “As you all know, when I went to Fu Shui’s Villa to rescue Sheng Chuling, I got ambushed. Fu Shui’s identity is extremely suspicious yet he entered the palace as an Imperial Physician and treated the Emperor. Until now, the Emperor

has yet to awake and there have been huge changes and personnel movements in court. Today, Prince Zhou summoned all the ministers and officials to court and I have reason to suspect that there is a conspiracy going on.”

Zong Jianxiu spoke first, “Are they conspiring to take the throne?”

Ye Qiulang was very direct. “General, what do you want us to do?”

Sheng Chumu replied, “Take hold of the Royal Palace and get rid of the evil.”

“Take hold of the Royal Palace? You want to take hold of the Royal Palace with just a hundred of you? Don’t you know the Royal Palace has high walls and deep courtyards?! It has copper walls and barriers!” Sheng Chuling was once an imperial guard and proudly believed that the protection of the palace was invulnerable.

Sheng Chumu was composed. “This is the Restricted Area with Chang’an to our west and the Royal Palace to our south. Between us and the Royal Palace, there is only one Xuanwu Gate. The Hundred Army knows the Xuanwu Gate as well as the formations of the Imperial Guards very well. We have already practiced and gone through this many times, including how to deal with seizing the throne.”

Ye Qiulang had a sudden realisation. “No wonder the Emperor did not intervene when we did those practices that should have been tabooed. So the reason why he arranged General to be in the Restricted Area was because...”

Sheng Chumu continued, “For Great Tang.”

Sheng Chuling’s mouth fell open slightly, “I see.”

To think that back then, he grumbled that the Emperor could not recognise talent. His Elder Brother was so impressive, yet because of the Crown Prince’s words, he was made into the general controlling just a hundred men. Although he was stationed in the Restricted Area, they had seemed like a group to help chase animals for hunts. Who would have known that he was the true expert!

The Crown Prince and Prince Han sat facing each other. Their stomachs were grumbling. Prince Han's stomach was rumbling especially loudly. They only had two meals a day and each meal consisted of half a bowl of porridge. It has been a few days. No matter how much the Crown Prince did not feel like eating, he would share half a bowl of porridge with Prince Han every day. Eventually, he was so hungry he could not stand it. What was strange was that Yu He had anticipated for the two brothers to quarrel and suffer, but it did not happen. On the contrary, they were on better terms.

"Why is it so late today? Will they not even give us half a bowl of porridge today?" Prince Han swallowed his saliva.

"Imperial Father is sick and Xinnan is dead. How can you still look forward to eating?" The Crown Prince was hungry but was not going to admit it.

"Then what can I do? At this point, it will be great if we don't starve to death." Prince Han sighed, "I am worried if Imperial Father continues to remain unconscious..."

"Imperial Father will recover." The Crown Prince cut him off with certainty.

"I said if..."

"There is no if. Imperial Father will get better..." The Crown Prince suddenly stopped talking as he saw three palace maids walk in front of their prison room with food baskets in their hands.

Prince Han's eyes lit up. "Heaven finally has eyes. We are finally having a big meal."

The Crown Prince glanced at him and lowered his voice. "The final big meal."

Prince Han was shocked as his face paled. "How can it be?"

The prison head opened the door. "Concubine Yan is generous and prepared..." Before he could complete his sentence, he was knocked

over by the food basket and fainted on the floor. . The Crown Prince and Prince Han were shocked.

“Court Lady Fu has orders to send Your Highnesses to the Emperor.” The palace maids were female officials that respected Fu Rou greatly.

The Crown Prince was pulled back to reality. “Why? Did Imperial Father...”

“The Emperor is still unconscious. However, Concubine Yan has captured Court Lady Fu and taken the Emperor’s Seal. She is about to forge an Imperial Decree of Succession. At this very moment, all the ministers are in court. As soon as the Imperial Decree arrives, Prince Zhou will be the new Emperor.”

Prince Han shouted, “This is a conspiracy!”

The Crown Prince’s expression changed. “We should head to the main hall to stop Prince Zhou.”

The leading female official shook her head. “No. Court Lady Fu has already made arrangements there. Both Your Highnesses have to protect the Emperor for things to have a chance to improve.”

The Crown Prince looked unwilling.

Prince Han agreed, “Crown Prince, we have both witnessed Court Lady Fu’s abilities. Imperial Mother looked upon her highly and handed the Six Offices to her. She will not let Imperial Mother down. Let’s listen to her.”

The Crown Prince stared at Prince Han for a while before nodding. He ended up in the state he is in today because he did not trust his own brother. Therefore, he swore that he would not make the same mistake.

At this moment, Prince Zhou was standing behind a screen, wearing the real Dragon Robe. His emotions were surging.

His Imperial Mother had told him that his Imperial Father had woken

up for a short moment and immediately sent out the Imperial Decree of Succession, choosing him to inherit the throne. He could not believe his ears. His Imperial Mother said that ultimately, he managed to move his Imperial Father and his Imperial Father approved of him as his most outstanding son. In that moment, all the humiliation that he had endured over the years dissolved.

Prince Zhou took a deep breath and stepped into the main hall. In front of all the ministers, he knelt in front of the throne and listened to Chief Cao as he read the decree.

“Heaven created people and gave someone to lead them. By leading with morals and principles, the citizens will be empowered. The first son, Li Chengqian, has failed and cannot bear the responsibility. He shall be demoted to a common person. I have many responsibilities and have not been able to rest well. Attending court has taken a toll on my health and I have many health issues. The third prince, Li Ge, looks ahead and is bright and clear. He is almost at the position and the throne shall be passed on to him. He shall lead the world.”

Every word that Chief Cao read slowly filled the gap in his heart all these years. Very soon, he realised that the court was extremely quiet.

Prince Zhou turned around to look. All the ministers, with Minister Fang leading them, did not express respect nor happiness. They all looked serious.

He narrowed his eyes and changed from passive to active. “This is an important matter. Minister Fang, please call two individuals that are familiar with Imperial Father’s handwriting to examine the Imperial Decree and determine if it is real.”

Fang Xuanling was unwilling to pass on the responsibility. “Minister Zhang, Minister Pang.”

The three of them walked forward to take the Imperial Decree. They examined it closely and exchanged looks. They admitted that this was the Emperor’s own handwriting. This time, Fang Xuanling took the lead and knelt. He led the ministers to cheer for long life.

Chief Cao announced, "The new Emperor shall ascend the throne, bow-"

Prince Zhou stepped in front of the throne and his hand touched the arm rest. Suddenly, a clear voice resounded.

"Imperial Father is still around, who dares to usurp the throne? This is a conspiracy!"

All the ministers turned around and saw Princess Xinnan. She was wearing a palace maid's uniform and a group of female officials followed behind her. They stood in the main door. Everyone thought that Xinnan had passed on. They did not expect her to still be alive and be accusing Prince Zhou of a conspiracy. They were all stunned for a moment.

Xinnan spoke loudly, "The Imperial Decree of Succession was forged!"

Fang Xuanling stood up.

Court Lady

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Fu Shui walked out from behind the screen and reprimanded, “Princess Xinnan, you faked your death and caused unrest in the palace. Now you are spouting nonsense and defaming the new Emperor. What ulterior motive do you have?”

Xinnan was fearless. “You all took the opportunity when Imperial Father was unconscious to get rid of the Duke Lu Residence and framed and hurt Sheng Chuling. You forced me to fake my death to escape. What are your ulterior motives? You are an Imperial Physician, yet you are in the main court and listening to such a big event of handing over the throne. I would like to ask you, who exactly are you?!”

Fu Shui was speechless and knew that with Xinnan’s personality, it was not possible for her to say such well thought out words.

Prince Zhou was surprised and suspicious. He glanced at Fu Shui but asked Xinnan, “On what basis do you say that the Imperial Decree of Succession was forged?”

“Based on facts! Based on how you all did anything you could to get the Emperor’s Seal for the fake Imperial Decree of Succession! Based on how you all do not dare to invite Chancellor Yu Minchen out for a confrontation!” *That’s right, Fu Rou was the one that taught her what to say!*

“Where is Yu Minchen?” Prince Zhou called out, “Wasn’t this Imperial Decree of Succession stamped with the Emperor’s Seal by Yu Minchen? Summon him immediately!”

Chief Cao and Fu Shui did not dare to say anything.

Prince Zhou suddenly understood. He bitterly laughed as he mocked himself. He had been lied to again! From his Imperial Father’s illness, to the Imperial Decree of Succession. They were all lies. It was a pity that he had wished for his father’s recognition so much that he was willing to be lied to, time and again. Deep in his heart, although he knew this was a dream, he wished that the dream would become real.

Fang Xuanling threw a look at several old ministers and they slowly made their way to the door.

Yan Zifang caught Fu Shui’s eye. “Guards!” A huge group of imperial guards appeared and closed the palace doors. They pushed Xinnan and Fang Xuanling to the side.

As Prince Zhou saw all these, he turned to look coldly at Fu Shui. “If you all are intending to rebel, don’t count me in.” He was about to walk down the stairs when he felt something cold on his neck.

Fu Shui held a dagger to his neck and spoke calmly, “Your Highness, you should think twice for Her Highness.”

Prince Zhou gritted his teeth. “Are you using my mother to threaten me?”

Fu Shui wanted to laugh but did not. “How can that be? Let Auntie tell it to you herself.”

Fu Shui locked Prince Zhou in the study room behind the main hall. He arranged for guards to remain outside before he left.

Prince Zhou paced around like a trapped animal. His Imperial Father did not hand the throne over to him, Fu Shui was controlling the ministers, and the forging of the Imperial Decree of Succession had been exposed. There is only one thing that Fu Shui can do now. He was going to kill everyone that knew and forcefully change the entire court. Blood was going to flow.

“Ge’er.” Concubine Yan walked in.

Prince Zhou halted and looked at his mother. He had known that he was merely a chess piece yet he willingly allowed himself to be used all because he believed that his mother truly wanted to protect him. However, him becoming Great Tang’s Emperor was one thing. Changing the entire Great Tang to rebuild Great Sui was another thing.

“Ask whatever you want.” Concubine Yan sighed lightly.

“What happened with the Imperial Decree of Succession?” He had to ask.

“We found the best forger in the world.”.

“Did Imperial Father’s old illness act up again?”

“He was given poison. If not, I would have died.”

Prince Zhou’s entire body froze as his eyes were filled with hatred. “Why? Why did you have to go to this point? Mother, I did not want anything. I just wanted you to be healthy and live a long life.”

“If the Empress’ sons take the throne, both you and I will have a short life.” Concubine Yan felt like she had no choice. “I know that you hate me. It is no use even if the hatred in your heart can reach the ends of the earth. We have done a thousand mistakes to get to this point. Now, you only have one road left. Regardless of whether you still acknowledge me as a mother in the future, I just hope that you will listen to me one last time.”

“Stop talking! You turned me into a bastard that killed his own father! I am a traitor that forged the Imperial Decree of Succession! A criminal that will be cursed by people for eternity! I thought that it was because you suffered too much and that is why you would do anything to protect yourself. I thought that no matter how greedy you were for power, you would have kinship in your heart. But you don’t! You don’t! What you cannot forget, is your previous status as a Princess! The Great Sui that has already been destroyed! You even made a move on Imperial Father, whom you have loved for tens of

years...” He was not going to listen to anyone anymore.

Concubine Yan suddenly turned to the door of the study room. She pretended to shout as if she wanted someone on the outside to hear, “You can’t die, I only have you as a son. You have to continue living. You have to rebuild Great Sui and become the Emperor. You have to live gloriously!” She then lowered her voice and grabbed his hand. She was trembling. “No matter what you decide, they will still kill your Imperial Father.”

Just now, Yu He and Fu Shui said that they were going to kill all the court ministers and change the entire court. This means that the Emperor had to die as well. Both the father and son no longer listened to her. She realised that all they cared about was reestablishing Great Sui, they did not care about her nor her son.

Prince Zhou froze. “Mother...”

“If you promise them, you will become a puppet Emperor that they can manipulate. They will have power and you will have to bear all the infamy.” Concubine Yan took out a pill and placed it in his hands. “Cao Yangde is the one who poisoned your father. I snuck into his room to find the antidote. Go and save your Imperial Father. Mend your ways and accomplish a meritorious deed. This is your last chance.”

Prince Zhou held onto the antidote tightly. Concubine Yan shouted once more, “Son, you finally understand me. Everything I have done is for you!”

Yu He pushed open the door and entered, “Elder Sister.”

Concubine Yan turned back and smiled, her tears had yet to dry. “Great, Ge’er has finally thought it through.”

Prince Zhou cooperated, “If I cannot be Great Tang’s Emperor, I will be Great Sui’s Emperor. There will be no tomorrow and the citizens don’t have a second ruler. However, he is still my biological father. If I really have to send him off, I want to send him off personally.”

Yu He smiled as well and called four guards to step forward. “His

Highness will be heading to Ganlou Palace to pay his filial piety. The four of you shall follow him. Don't lose him."

Prince Zhou walked out and the guards followed him closely. Concubine Yan was in a daze as she sent him off.

Yu He looked at Concubine Yan as his eyes turned cold. He had followed her for so many years. How could he not know whether she truly loved the Emperor? Therefore, the fact that she suddenly changed her mind and agreed to kill the Emperor made him all the more suspicious.

Concubine Yan was fidgety. She held a book of scriptures in her hand but was not absorbing anything. *Her son had gone for a long time but there was no news from him. She did not know if the antidote had been useful or if the Emperor had awakened. If the Emperor had awakened, she wondered if he would forgive Ge'er.*

She was feeling flustered. As she moved to place down the book of scriptures, it fell onto the floor. She bent over to pick it up when she suddenly heard a *bam* sound from the door.

"Your Highness, things have gone bad!" Jin'er ran in. "The imperial guards said that Prince Zhou fed the Emperor some kind of antidote and they made a move on Prince Zhou. They...they...killed Prince Zhou!"

Concubine Yan stood up in a panic. Her vision blurred.

Jin'er rushed to help her sit. Concubine Yan cried, "Ge'er, this is all my fault. I should not have given you the antidote! I should not have asked you to save the Emperor!"

Chief Cao and Yu He walked in. Jin'er looked guilty as she took her leave.

Concubine Yan shuddered as she wiped her tears. "What is going on?"

Chief Cao ignored Concubine Yan. He ordered the imperial guards at

the door, “Lock up Ganlou Palace. Tell General Zhong that Prince Zhou is now our enemy. There is no need to keep him alive.”

Concubine Yan was furious. “How dare you!”

Yu He walked towards Concubine Yan. “Why won’t we dare? You were the one that betrayed Great Sui first. You betrayed our lifetime ambition!”

Concubine Yan shook her head. “I have already said that for the Yang family and for Great Sui, I would do anything. Except to harm the Emperor! I have been married to him for so many years, I cannot kill him!”

Chief Cao cut in coldly, “I have said before that you are too soft. You only remember her as your biological sister but you forgot that she belongs to Li Shimin.”

Yu He gritted his teeth and his temples bulged out. “I will not be soft anymore. Everyone from the Li royal family must die. Including Prince Zhou. I will get rid of all the roots to prevent any future disasters.”

Concubine Yan slapped Yu He hard. “I won’t allow this!”

Yu He suddenly reached out to strangle her. “Won’t allow? Who are you to allow or not? I crippled [\[1\]](#) myself, put up with humiliation, willingly let myself become a despicable rock for you to step and trample on so that you could climb higher. But what did I get in return? Your betrayal!”

Concubine Yan was stunned as she flared at Yu He. Both her hands grabbed onto his as she tried her best to pry his off her neck. She was extremely regretful. She should not have fought. Because of her ambition, she grew Yu He’s excessive greed and it eventually ruined her.

“What is Prince Zhou? He is just the grandson of the Great Sui’s Emperor. He even has our enemy’s blood flowing through him! *I* am a prince of Great Sui! My Fu Shui is a blood descendant of our Great Sui’s Emperor! His blood is more precious than Prince Zhou’s. He

should rightfully be the new emperor of Great Sui! We don't need you or Li Shimin's son!" Yu He's eyes were red as he bellowed, strangling Concubine Yan.

Concubine Yan's struggles slowly weakened as her face turned from red to white. Her veins burst as her shoulders sagged.

Yu He did not notice that Concubine Yan had stopped breathing and continued to shake her. "I am the true prince of Great Sui! My son has the true royal blood of Great Sui!"

Chief Cao notified him, "She is dead."

Yu He's consciousness returned as he saw Concubine Yan's pale face. He released his hand and Concubine Yan fell to the ground lifelessly. His breath was urgent as he looked annoyed. He bent down and reached out to touch Concubine Yan's face.

Chief Cao suddenly kneeled in greeting, "Congratulations, Your Highness. You have overcome the last obstacle to help Fu Shui obtain the throne. Fu Shui is brilliant in many ways, brave and firm. He will become a mighty ruler and bring back Great Sui's glorious days."

Yu He's movements paused as his eyes filled with greed once more. "Yes, Fu Shui will become a mighty ruler. This kingdom does not belong to her son but my son. It should have been this way. It should have been!"

It was his sister's fault. She was too selfish and only thought of her own son. She had never cared about Great Sui's future! The married woman has returned home. He did not need to feel guilty! Great Sui belongs to the Yang, not the Li!

1. chopped his dick to be a eunuch

I did not expect this either...

Court Lady

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Prince Zhou stood in a defensive position with a longsword in his hands. Behind him, the Crown Prince and Prince Han followed closely. The Crown Prince was carrying their sleeping father on their back. In their efforts to be filial to their father, the three brothers were finally united.

Prince Zhou could sense the movements around them and looked back. He saw Prince Han shove a snack in his mouth and could not help but laugh. “Prince Han, how can you still eat while you move?”

Prince Han spoke as he ate, “Why don’t you try eating half a bowl of porridge for every meal?” He suddenly stared at the Crown Prince’s back. He rushed over emotionally, “Imperial Father has awoken!”

The Crown Prince let the Emperor down and Prince Zhou walked back quickly.

The sight of the Xuanwu Gate, towering mightily, appeared in front of the Emperor.

“Xuanwu Gate?” He struggled to say these few words.

Prince Zhou explained, “Chief Cao and Yu He has control of the imperial guards now. They are searching for us everywhere. This area has the weakest security. Imperial Father, rest assured. We will bring you out safely.”

Prince Han mumbled, "This Xuanwu Gate is too crazy. Back then--"

The Crown Prince cut him off, "Back then, Imperial Father, you ruined Crown Prince Yin's scheme to harm you. This time, you will also be able to avert disaster."

Prince Han quickly agreed, "Yes, yes. Heaven has chosen Imperial Father, Imperial Father will enjoy never-ending longevity."

The Emperor looked at the Crown Prince and did something he hasn't done in a long time. He smiled knowingly.

The Crown Prince carried the Emperor once again and ran towards the stone steps of the Xuanwu Gate. Prince Han ran forwards two steps but saw that Prince Zhou was not following them. He turned to rush him.

Prince Zhou drew out his sword and said sternly, "They are about to catch up. You all should go ahead first."

As soon as he finished speaking, imperial guards appeared on the other side of the square. Yu He and Chief Cao were behind them.

Prince Han narrowed his eyes as he saw what Yu He was wearing. "Isn't that the dragon robe from the Sui Dynasty? Prince Zhou, I don't think they will spare you. You should run with us."

Prince Zhou suddenly dashed towards the imperial guards and shouted, "Go first! I will follow behind. We have to protect Imperial Father!"

Prince Han saw how Prince Zhou quickly got rid of a few guards and was surprised, "Okay, then you can help to slow them down. When you can no longer hold them back, hurry and run." He then turned and ran after the Crown Prince.

Yu He fumed, "Li Ge, you are asking for death, don't blame me for being heartless. Imperial Guards, Prince Zhou, Prince Han and the Crown Prince are colluding to kill the Emperor. Concubine Yan has ordered to kill them for the greater good, there is no need to spare anyone."

Even more imperial guards surged forwards and surrounded Prince Zhou.

Chief Cao praised Yu He, “Your Highness has indeed inherited the decisiveness of the late Emperor. The Imperial Guards obey Concubine Yan. We cannot let them know of her death and affect their emotions.”

Yu He nodded.

Prince Zhou guarded while looking at how the situation was at the Crown Prince and Prince Han’s side. He saw that they were about to reach the stone steps of the Xuanwu Gate. He did not even have time to celebrate before he saw them running down. The imperial guards at the Xuanwu Gate were also their enemy.

Prince Zhou broke through the guards surrounding him and met up with the Crown Prince and Prince Han at the stone stairs. The Crown Prince let the Emperor down and instructed Prince Han, “Take care of Imperial Father.” He then ran down, intending to fight side by side with Prince Zhou even if he was unarmed.

Prince Zhou slashed out and managed to get a sword from one of the guards. The Crown Prince took it. “Thanks.”

“You are welcome.”

Prince Zhou’s sword slashed out again, helping the Crown Prince defend a sneak attack to his side. The Crown Prince collaborated well and moved to where Prince Zhou was, taking down another man.

Prince Han did not notice the rapport between the Crown Prince and Prince Zhou. He was comforting the distressed Emperor, “Imperial Father, don’t be anxious, Heaven will help the worthy. Assistance will always come at the most critical point. When I was surrounded by Prince Zhao’s army, that scene was much scarier than this. I thought that I was sure to die...” Light flashed in the corner of his eye but he saw that the Crown Prince and Prince Zhou was at a disadvantageous position and they were forced to retreat slowly. It looked as if they were about to be taken down. Prince Han spoke quickly, “At the last critical moment, Chumu came.....Wah! Wah! Wah!”

Prince Han shot up in delight as he pointed to the sky. "He's here! Chumu is here!"

Guards fell from the city gate's tower. Ropes seemed to drop from the sky. Sheng Chumu was the first to rush down, followed quickly by the Hundred Army. They placed themselves between Prince Zhou and the Crown Prince and the Imperial Guards. They formed up neatly, like an iron wall. Very quickly, they inserted themselves within the imperial guards. The soldiers from the Hundred Army could each take on a hundred men by themselves. The imperial guards were no match for them and were quickly defeated. Sheng Chumu and Sheng Chuling were like a ray of hope as they quickly attacked Yu He and Chief Cao, capturing them in a flash.

Sheng Chuling glanced at Yu He and was curious. "A court attire from the Sui Dynasty? Which grave did you dig this up from?"

Yu He was fuming but did not say anything. He was shocked at how frightening Sheng Chumu and his Hundred Army was. They had so many imperial guards but could not do anything.

Sheng Chumu did not stop to rest as he rushed in front of the Emperor. He kneeled on one knee. "Your Majesty, please forgive me for arriving late!"

The Emperor opened his mouth. Prince Han spoke emotionally on his behalf, "You came just in time. Just in time!" He turned around and spoke to Prince Zhou, who was covered in scars and panting, "Chumu saved your life this time. If you still keep trying to steal his wife, you will have no conscience!"

Sheng Chumu was about to ask where Fu Rou was when Sheng Chuling ran over. "This is bad, Minister Fang and the rest of the ministers are still in the main hall. Fu Shui is about to kill them all!"

The Emperor grabbed Sheng Chumu's wrist. "Sheng Chumu..." He was too weak to continue.

"Your Majesty, please rest assured, I will not let their conspiracy succeed. Zong Jianxiu, you are to stay behind to protect His Majesty. Sheng Chuling, Ye Qiulang, follow me to the main hall!" Sheng

Chumu rushed on.

In the main hall, the countless number of blood streaks on the ground was frightening. However, the blood did not belong to the ministers. Instead, they belong to Fu Shui's rebel army. Fu Shui stepped over the blood lines and gazed coldly, "Yan Zifang. You traitor!"

Yan Zifang's eyes were even colder. "As pirates, we are always double-crossing and backstabbing. There is no master that lasts forever. However, we have enemies that last forever. Whoever that kills one of my brothers will become my enemy forever!"

Fu Shui had killed Ma Haihu. From the moment he found out that Ma Haihu had gone missing, he knew. However, what he did not know was how long Fu Shui and his side had planned for this. With just him alone, he would not be able to bring them down. Therefore he had silently remained in the background until this moment. It was time for him to take revenge.

Just now, when Fu Shui ordered for all the ministers to be killed, his sword, along with the swords of the imperial guards under him, pierced into the hearts of the rebel army. The situation had turned.

Fu Shui suddenly laughed, "Do you think that with so little people, you will be able to save them all? At this very moment, my father has killed Prince Zhou, the Crown Prince, Prince Han and Li Shimin. This world no longer belongs to the Li's! All of you foolish ex-court ministers will not be able to survive."

Yan Zifang looked back at the ministers, who had gone silent out of fear, before turning back. His gaze fell behind Fu Shui. A strange smile appeared on his solemn face.

"If I were you, I would not be so confident."

Fu Shui followed Yan Zifang's gaze and looked out. He was shocked. He quickly walked out of the hall. There was a long line of swift shadows heading towards them. It was like a black dragon. Leading them was Sheng Chumu!

Yan Zifang took advantage of the situation and led people to block the entrance of the hall. Xinnan's courage grew as she poked her head out beside Yan Zifang, she waved her hands excitedly. "Chuling! Chuling! I am here!"

Sheng Chuling immediately ran to the front and was faster than Sheng Chumu. He shouted at Xinnan, "Xinnan, I am here! I will marry you today!"

Xinnan looked like a flower when she laughed. Yan Zifang sighed. *Could this couple look at the situation around them? They were holding real weapons and people were about to die all around them!*

Sheng Chumu had the same thoughts as he pushed Chuling, who was standing at the top of the stone stairs and blocking the way. "Fu Shui, you are surrounded. You have lost, surrender now!"

Yan Zifang mocked, "Oi, can you come later? Are you trying to claim all the glory to yourself after using me?"

Fu Shui came to a realisation. "Both of you were working together?" *No wonder this plan had so many hiccups!*

Sheng Chumu winked, "My apologies, you were just promoted by someone to become the assistant commander and now I am offering him amnesty." His strength was in speaking persuasively. Be it women or pirates, he won them all.

Fu Shui guffawed, "Good! Very good! You all have skills! But did you think that I only had the imperial guards to count on in my entire chess game? The number of loyal soldiers that have not forgotten Great Sui are more than you can imagine!"

He suddenly whistled. Groups of men appeared at every entrance to the main hall. They all wore Great Sui's armour.

Yan Zifang and Sheng Chumu waved and their main forces attacked. Both of them focused on surrounding Fu Shui.

Fu Shui spoke with disdain, "The two of you are fighting just one of me. How can you call yourself a hero?"

As soon as Sheng Chumu heard this, he kicked away Yan Zifang's sword. At the same time, he attacked, "I am here to challenge you. I will let you die contently!"

Yan Zifang did not argue. "Sheng Chumu, if you lose you better not cry!" He walked down the stairs and looked at the enemies in front of them.

Sheng Chumu did not respond as he focused on Fu Shui. Very soon, Fu Shui understood that Sheng Chumu was a lot stronger than he had imagined.

"You appeared and disappeared unexpectedly and you are powerful in all aspects. Yet, you are a loser that can't even protect the woman you love!" Since he was not as skilled, he had to use underhanded means.

Sheng Chumu's actions truly halted and his thigh suffered a blow from Fu Shui. He knelt on the ground in pain. However, he tilted his head up. "What did you do to Rou'er?"

Fu Shui moved behind Sheng Chumu, ready to pierce his heart. "Don't ask, I will send you on your way to meet--" A sword pierced through.

Unexpectedly, his sword pierced through Sheng Chumu's soft armour and stopped there. A gold thread appeared. At this very moment, Sheng Chumu jumped up and pierced Fu Shui's heart.

Fu Shui stared as fresh blood spurted from his mouth. "Golden-thread Heavenly Armour? How can that--" He did not complete his sentence as his head tilted to the side and he died.

Sheng Chumu stared blankly at the battle happening in front of him. The Hundred Army was at an advantage and victory was certain. He subconsciously touched his collar, touching the Golden-thread Heavenly Armour. Fu Rou had given this to him after they got attacked on their trip with Prince Qin. She took it off herself and insisted that he took it. She said that the Golden-thread Heavenly Armour could not defend against the poison in the palace but it could help him on the battlefield. Her only wish was for him to return in

triumph. Therefore, he had accepted it. For her.

He suddenly trembled as he stood and ran into Concubine Yan's palace. *His Rou'er was smart and kind. She is blessed with good fortune and heaven will protect her. Nothing will happen to her!*

lol Fu Shui died just like that...uhh ok.

And yay, Yan Zifang decided to turn "good"! People keep changing sides in this novel. Who would've thought the three brothers would end up working together!?!?!?

Court Lady

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Sheng Chumu rushed into Concubine Yan's palace and was shocked when he saw her corpse. Yu He and Fu Shui were brutal. If they could even kill Concubine Yan, what about Fu Rou?

He yelled, "Rou'er---Rou'er---"

He went through rooms after rooms but did not see any sign of Fu Rou. It was only when he passed a small courtyard, he saw a half-opened fan hanging by a lock. His heart palpitated as he slowly walked over.

There was someone wearing a palace maid's attire lying on the ground.

He thought to himself. *This is not Rou'er. Rou'er is the court lady of the Six Offices and should be wearing a female official attire.* But those pale white hands and the scattered fine black hair all reminded him of the girl that yearned for.

His voice was low. "Rou'er?"

The person did not move.

He walked into the room and quietly looked at her for a moment. He then squatted down to flip her over. Her complexion was as white as paper. Yet, her eyebrows were intricate, as if they were in a painting.

Her once cherry red lips were now pale. If this was not Fu Rou, who else would it be?

He gently hugged her in his embrace. With trembling hands, he held her cold face. "Rou'er, I am here. Wake up."

The person remained lifeless.

"Rou'er, don't be petty. Didn't we agree? When the Emperor wakes up and Prince Qin returns to the palace safely, we will beg the Emperor for grace. I know that I don't understand things well. Whenever it comes to you, my brain does not work well and I would be immature, causing you to be upset. But I promise I will not do it in the future. From now onwards, I will listen to you. If you say let's go to the east, I will definitely not head west. Okay? Open your eyes. Smile for me. If not..." Tears fell down his face in that instant. He hugged her tightly as he cried aloud, "No! No! No! Heaven cannot be so cruel. We have gone through so much. It was so difficult...so difficult for us..."

Some time passed and the sun was in the west. The golden rays slowly turned to dark blue. A few crisp bird calls broke the deathly silence. Sheng Chumu lifted his head in a daze and saw a pair of green parrots land on a tree in the yard. They were playing with each other, yet they looked so sweet.

The tired bird returns to the nest. As he thought of this, his nose soured. All of a sudden, he felt a pulling sensation by his side. He looked down to see the corner of his shirt being pulled. He was in disbelief. He did not dare to confirm the owner of this hand but his breathing became faster.

"Chumu..." A gentle call, like a drizzle in a forest. His entire body froze as he hugged her even tighter, putting his face against hers. *She's warm!*

Tears rolled down his face. "Rou'er, you are back...you are back..."

Fu Rou blinked and her consciousness slowly returned. She suddenly hugged him tightly. "Chumu, you are here! You are finally here! I was so afraid. They wanted me to take poison and forcefully shoved

it in my mouth. I thought I would never see you again!”

At this moment, for the person she loved, all her strength turned into a pond of spring water.

“Don’t be afraid! Don’t be afraid! Rou’er, we have been separated by death twice, it won’t happen a third time. I swear on my life that there will not be a third time--”

She covered his mouth with her hand, and emotions filled her eyes. “No. Don’t swear on your life. You have to live well. That is the only way for me to live well.”

The two of them hugged for a long time, until the light of dawn shone in, and slowly dyed the entire room.

On this day, the Emperor personally held morning court. Although his voice was slightly weak, he looked a lot better.

Sheng Xiaojing, who seldom appeared, came out looking energetic. “Your Majesty, I have caught Lu Yunji and Lu Qi. Please give me instructions, Your Majesty!”

The Lu father and son pair were pushed into the main hall.

Lu Qi had escaped after the Crown Prince’s rebellion and met up with Lu Yunji, who had been out of the city. Lu Yunji then repeatedly delayed his return trip. He only made a move when he received Concubine Yan’s personal order to shift his troops to protect Chang’an. Unexpectedly, Lu Yunji met with Sheng Xiaojing’s blockage not far from Chang’an. Lu Yunji then found out that the Emperor had already suspected that he killed Du Ning. At the time, the Emperor had secretly instructed Sheng Xiaojing to lead an army to wait for the father and son pair. Seeing that he was on the losing side, Lu Yunji did not struggle and surrendered to Sheng Xiaojing.

The Emperor asked in a low voice, “Lu Yunji, do you know your crime?”

Lu Yunji kneeled and spoke sincerely, “I have committed a huge

crime and deserves to be given the death sentence. I am willing to be punished according to the law!”

The Emperor saw that Lu Yunji was asking for the death punishment and this stirred up his emotions. He staggered off his throne and came in front of Lu Yunji. “You were with me when we had wars all over the country and made a lot of contributions. In the ninth year of Wude, you saw Crown Prince Yin’s intention to kill me and pleaded with me to break off the relationship. You were the one that gave me the determination to lead the Xuanwu Gate Coup. Yunji, your picture is still displayed in Lingyan Palace. How can you make me endure this today?”

Tears flowed down Lu Yunji’s face. “I have made so many mistakes and they are all mine to bear. I was lucky to have met a brilliant ruler like Your Majesty but I failed in my later years. Now, I only can die to pay for my crime. All I hope is that Your Majesty will consider the number of years I have served you, along with my contributions, and forgive my son. After I die, I hope that my son is still alive to bury me.”

Sheng Xiaojing froze. He finally understood why Lu Yunji surrendered.

Lu Qi became anxious. “Your Majesty, my father is old. After so many years spent fighting, he has a full body of injuries. Please let him live, Your Majesty. I am willing to bear my father’s crime!”

“Your Majesty, Lu Qi has made mistakes because I led him onto the wrong route. My crime is unforgivable!” Lu Yunji kowtowed repeatedly until his entire face was stained with blood.

Lu Qi cried as he called out, “Father!”

Sheng Xiaojing suddenly fell to a kneel. “Your Majesty, Lu Yunji was in control of an army. If he meant to resist, a lot of blood would have been spilt and we would have suffered severely. But as soon as I took out the Imperial Decree, Lu Yunji did not say anything more and got off his horse to surrender. Please consider the circumstances, Your Majesty.”

The Emperor fell silent for a moment. “Okay, I promise you. Lu Qi will not receive the death punishment. He shall be exiled to the south.”

Lu Yunji sobbed, “Thank you for your grace! Thank you for your grace!”

The Emperor continued, “Lu Yunji. Behead.”

Lu Qi wanted to plead. “Your Majesty...”

Lu Yunji spoke loudly to drown out his son, “I willingly accept my death punishment! The Emperor is benevolent!”

The Emperor held onto the golden railing as he walked towards the throne. He turned back. His voice was filled with pain. “Yunji, for you, in this life and from today onwards, I will not go to Lingyan Palace anymore.”

He will allow the loyal general that protected him with his life to forever remain in the picture without any blemish. In Lingyan Palace, real heroes were hung in it.

Lu Yunji and his son were the last to go down in this massive change.

Soon after, Imperial decrees were sent out. Huge criminals like Yu He, Cao Yangde, Lu Yunji were all to be beheaded. Criminals with smaller crimes like Prince Han and Prince Zhou would be demoted to county lords. Those with contributions like Concubine Qiao would be promoted. Li Baolin would be promoted as well. Xinnan was granted marriage to Sheng Chuling. What Fu Rou did not expect was that Xiao Lu, who had protected Prince Qin, would be conferred the title of Talented Lady.

Fu Rou was summoned by the Emperor. She walked out of the Six Offices only to see Xiao Lu, who had donned on the Talented Lady attire, looking dazedly at Prince Qin’s palace. Fu Rou sighed. How could she not understand the hazy feelings between Xiao Lu and Prince Qin. However, in many people’s eyes, the biggest reward to a palace maid was to be promoted into the harem. Helpless and

lamentable, yet there was no turning back.

“Xiao Lu.” She did not want this child to let her mind run wild and waste time on insignificant things.

“Court Lady Fu, they said that a Talented Lady belongs to the Emperor. From today onwards, I can no longer look for Prince Qin to study or play. I don’t like this reward. Can you tell the Emperor that I don’t want any reward? Can he take this back?” Xiao Lu’s eyes were filled with sorrow.

Fu Rou shook her head. “The Emperor’s decisions are final and we cannot go against the decision. However, Xiao Lu, the road you are on may be craggy. There may be bends but you must persevere and walk down in determination. You will eventually reach where you want to go. You have to remember that the Emperor is a brilliant ruler. He can give you a chance to enjoy a glorious lifestyle and he will also respect your wishes as long as you express them properly.”

Xiao Lu perked up slightly. “Mmhm, I will be like you and respect the Emperor. If I treat him sincerely, everything will be well.”

Fu Rou smiled back and headed to Ganlou Palace. However, when she reached the outside of the palace, she overheard the discussions inside on how to deal with the Crown Prince. They were basically all on one side. They all believed that the Crown Prince rebelled. Although he saved his father and was not completely incorrigible, his small contribution cannot cover up for his huge mistake. He deserved the death penalty. Even Minister Fang believed that they could not ignore the law. Only the Emperor was hesitant and Fu Rou could sense his willingness to forgive.

Fu Rou walked in and greeted, “Your Majesty.”

The Emperor was slightly eager. “Court Lady Fu, you came just in time. I would like to hear your views.”

Fu Rou presented a book. “Your Majesty, I have nothing to say but I would like to submit a book.”

The Emperor was curious. “A book?”

“Yes, this book is called < < Women Principles > > . It was compiled by Empress Wende. It consists of the experience and reason she obtained from reading histories of various ladies. There are a total of ten volumes.”

The Emperor was moved and he personally took the book. As he flipped through it, longing filled his eyes. “It is really the late Empress’ handwriting...”

Fu Rou said, “Her Majesty handed this book over to me and said that she was filled with health issues and knew that she would not be able to accompany Your Majesty till old age. Therefore, she personally wrote this book as a remembrance. She wanted you to look at the book as if you were looking at her and care for the flesh and blood that she has left behind for you.”

The Emperor recalled the task entrusted to him by the Empress before she died. If there were a day that her children created trouble because of their conflict and let her down, she wished that he would allow them to live.

Hot tears flowed down the Emperor’s face. “I promised the Empress that no matter what happened, I will protect Chengqian and his brother’s life. Moreover, the effort and hard work that the late Empress put into compiling < < Women Principles > > is sufficient to eliminate her children’s wrongdoing. Heed my decree. Li Chengqian shall be pardoned from the death sentence. Let him go to Qianzhou.”

Fang Xuanling and the rest did not say more. They all held a memory for the late Empress in their hearts.

“Your Majesty, in the past you were a compassionate father. Now, you are benevolent.”

A load was taken off the Emperor’s mind. “Court Lady Fu, follow me to Lizheng Palace.”

Fu Rou abided, “Understood.”

The both of them walked, one in front of the other. Only when they reached Lizheng Palace did they slow down. On this peaceful night,

the moonlight shone clearly.

The Emperor sighed, “Ever since the Empress passed, the moonlight has never been this beautiful.”

Fu Rou looked down. “Since I entered the palace, I was able to receive Her Majesty’s teachings. After she passed on, so many things happened. Sometimes it feels as if I have stayed in the palace for over a hundred years.” *She wanted to leave this place. She wanted to start a new life.*

The Emperor smiled. He had guessed it. “Court Lady Fu, you are finally saying it?”

Fu Rou kneeled. “Please have grace, Your Majesty.”

“Sheng Chumu has been coming to Ganlou Palace daily to kneel, plead, coax and kowtow. He is making a scene like a child that did not get to eat candy. It is more interesting than a monkey show. I would like to see this for another two days.” *It was rare to see such an entertaining scene.*

“Your Majesty.....” Fu Rou chuckled bitterly.

“Hehe, they all say that when a girl is of age, she must be married off. When a female official is of age, she cannot stay as well. The Rites Office said that until now, you still haven’t passed your Internal Entry Examination?”

The two of them were outstanding court members that helped save the crisis. If he did not give in to them, he would be unreasonable. Oh well, he should let them be grateful so that they will continue to be loyal and protect Great Tang.

Fu Rou was nervous. “Er...”

“Since you haven’t even passed the Internal Entry Examination, you have less rules binding you compared to others. I shall pardon you from your position as Court Lady of the Six Offices. You can leave tonight.” As soon as he said this, the Emperor saw Fu Rou’s delighted expression.

Fu Rou could not believe her ears. “Really?”

“Since you and Xinnan both want to become Duke Lu’s daughter-in-laws, I will allow you and Xinnan to get married on the same day. You shall have whatever dowry and ceremony that Xinnan has. Let the Duke Lu Residence be exciting and have double happiness.” *Has he said this clearly enough?* The Emperor smiled joyously.

Fu Rou kneeled. “Thank you for your grace, Your Majesty.”

There's only one more part left!! Come back in a few hours! I want to watch the episode and then share my thoughts in the last chapter.

Court Lady

Friends, we're announcing the release of '[The Regressed Demon Lord is Kind](#)', and updating the initial 6-book Amazon release of Sovereign of the Three Realms, with the next 6 books in the series waiting for Amazon approval!

The Regressed Demon Lord is Kind: This is a rather different story from most of the reincarnation stories we've seen in the past! In his past life, Zich was an outcast youth who, in an obsessive quest for power, became known as the 'Demon Lord of Strength'. His reign, however, came to an end...

[Read More...](#)

Although this was what happened, as soon as Fu Rou walked out of Lizheng Palace, she felt like she was not standing on solid ground. All of a sudden, she saw a group of imperial guards bringing about a group of internal attendants. Yang Bo was amongst them. She hurried to catch up and asked one of the imperial guards to accommodate her. She wanted to speak to Yang Bo.

Fu Rou's name had spread throughout the entire palace and everyone knew how highly the Emperor regarded her. They had to give her face.

Fu Rou walked up to Yang Bo. "When Concubine Yan used my family to threaten me, you gave me the pill to fake my death. No matter how I think of it, it is too coincidental."

Yang Bo spoke truthfully, "Those were Concubine Yan's intentions. She did not want to hurt the woman that Prince Zhou loved. She hoped that you would take the pill and get out of it."

Fu Rou found it strange and asked, "What about the mistake with the poison?"

Yang Bo nodded. "I did that by myself. Although I wanted to take revenge for Yang Hou, I never wanted to hurt you."

Fu Rou's eyes flashed. "I will report whatever you did to the

Emperor. I hope that it will help your circumstance.”

Yang Bo chuckled bitterly, “So helping others is helping myself.”

“That’s right. A moment of kindness is a chance at life. Take care.”

Yang Bo turned and left.

On the fifteenth day of March, happiness was booming. Two palanquins with eight carriers left the palace, heading towards the marriage ceremony. There were so many people sending them off that there was no end in sight.

Prince Zhou, who was about to set off as well, stared in a daze at one of the carriage until it disappeared at the end of the street.

His mother was dead. His Imperial Father had announced that she had been killed by Yu He and Cao Yangde. He said that she did not play a part in the conspiracy to seize the throne and protected his and his mother’s reputation. His Imperial Father allowed him to return to his feudal land to become a free and rich noble. However, he was no longer allowed to return to Chang’an.

His Imperial Father forgave him but he could never forgive himself. Leaving was the best choice. The only person he could not let go off was about to become someone else’s bride today. Now, he had no choice but to let her go.

He held the jade pendant in his hand, wanting to throw it away but could not do it. He kept it once more. Who knows? Perhaps after his new start, he could fall in love again and receive the love of someone else.

Prince Zhou smiled and lightly kicked his horse, galloping in the opposite direction.

The palanquin entered the Duke Lu Residence and the two new couples completed the marriage ceremony and entered their bridal

rooms.

When the surroundings had gone completely silent, Fu Rou pulled open the veil around her head and opened the window in the back of the room. She gazed up at the stars in the sky. Her heart had finally settled.

Outside the window, she could no longer see the high palace walls. Only a plain lantern shone silently in the simple courtyard and corridor.

“What are you looking at?” Sheng Chumu’s smiling face appeared outside the window.

“The stars.” Fu Rou was dazzled by Sheng Chumu in his marriage outfit. He was such a handsome groom.

Sheng Chumu waved at her and walked to the railing. He patted the railing, “Come, this is the best spot.”

Fu Rou looked at the wine that they were supposed to exchange on the table. “This...is against the rules.”

Sheng Chumu broke into a smile. “We don’t have so many rules in the Duke Lu Residence. We will do whatever is comfortable. Rou’er, come here!”

Fu Rou breathed out a long breath. *That’s right, this was no longer the Royal Palace. It was her home.*

She walked out and sat beside him, allowing him to hold her hand.

“Yan Zifang has gone back to being a pirate. He double-crosses so much. One moment he is with the Crown Prince and the next moment he is with Prince Zhou. Although he managed to turn back onto the right path when it was critical, the Emperor was done with him. Initially, he wanted to teach him a lesson but ended up accepting it. Yan Zifang disappeared very quickly and even took that picture of the ocean.” *He and Yan Zifang would probably never be friends. They were on too different paths.*

“Lu Yingying has disappeared as well. Father said that she went to

her father's grave but did not return even after half a day. Initially, she said that she wanted to see me marry off. Chumu, I am a little worried about her. She is all by herself..."

"She will be fine." He was confident.

"Eh? You know something?" She pressed him. "Tell me!"

"She was probably grabbed by Yan Zifang onto the ship. If not, why do you think Yan Zifang would allow me to offer him amnesty? I know the location of his future wife." Hehe, his predictions were amazing.

"Yan Zifang is finally enlightened." She quite enjoyed the two of them together.

"Destiny will cause enemies to meet." He moved closer to her.

"Speaking of enemies, guess what. Before I left, Brother Tao told me that Sister Yin took Shan'er with her to accompany Lu Qi around the country. She said that they both took revenge and it should end here. She was going to go through thick and thin with Lu Qi from now on. Maybe I will never see her again in this lifetime." Fu Rou was suddenly upset as she sighed.

"Aiya, aiya, my good Rou'er, it is such a joyous day, you should not sigh. I promise you. If there is a chance, I will talk to Lu Qi. If he has truly changed, perhaps he could return to Chang'an. It is not possible for him to become an official again but he could become a rich landowner. When the time comes, Sister Yin will not have to suffer." He turned to stare foolishly at her beautiful and elegant features.

"But I am still worried. She doesn't have any money..." Her sentence was eaten by her new groom.

She did not avoid him but placed both her arms around his neck and responded shyly. Sheng Chumu carried Fu Rou up and brought her into their bridal room.

The room door closed. The character of happiness [1] was bright red and the candlelight was suddenly extinguished.

A beautiful moon with shining stars smiled down on every couple.

--End--

1. <https://www.houzz.com/products/chinese-character-oil-painting-happiness-prvw-vr~10151655> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZSs0_SbV-Q

Hello! Coca here. Thank you for following this book through to the end! Hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed translating it (except for some infuriating parts where I really had to psych myself to not pretend to kill off a character in the translation). At least it all ended well. Thanks also to Grace who have been with me through the many changes of this book! We did it!!

We're finally done! Thank you for reading, everyone! I just finished watching the final episode, and I can say it gave me bittersweet feelings. The drama did a really good job with the Lu Yunji surrender scene. It was really touching when Chumu's dad was begging the Emperor to give Lu Yunji a lighter punishment. The scene where he was tugging the Emperor's robe actually almost made me want to tear up.

However, I had a lot of issues with the drama after episode 46. I think due to Chinese censorship or some new rule, they had to shorten the drama by A LOT. Apparently, it was supposed to be 69 episodes but they cut it down to 55. It wouldn't have been so bad if they didn't do it all near the end, but they did. It was SUPER confusing to watch near the end. The drama never even explained the relationship between Concubine Yan and Yu He. People who are drama watchers don't even know they are siblings. It just seemed like she was being controlled for some reason. But maybe because the Yu He in the drama looks way too young to be Fu Shui's dad, so they didn't mention it (it wouldn't make sense unless Yu He had a child when he was a kid).

I personally preferred the novel more than the drama because of all the internal dialogue. There were so many scenes in the novel that

touched my heart, but in the drama, most of the touching scenes did not seem that touching to me. (Although Consort Han's death was super sad... the acting was good.)

For those of you who are debating whether to watch the drama or not, I would watch it if you really enjoyed the novel and want to do a comparison. The costumes are amazing, and it is definitely very high quality work. There are parts where the drama was better than the novel. Ex. The drama did a lot better with Prince Zhao's rebellion and training the Hundred Army. They also helped prepare the viewers a lot for what's to come (Ex. Xiahan getting revenge for Xiong Rui). I think I was genuinely more surprised when reading, since the novel didn't have scenes that prepared us.

I really liked how the brothers ended up working together in the end. The drama also talked a lot about karma; cause and effect. We see this especially towards the end when all the issues that seemed insignificant at the time altered the future. It gave me a lot of complicated emotions, and I did enjoy it a lot. Although Coca was the translator, I was the translation checker and editor (and the person who was communicating with Huanyu Entertainment). It was actually a lot of work, because we had to go through the script multiple times due to so many changes (story and like 30 names). Nonetheless, I hope you guys enjoyed it! Please leave comments and reviews and tell others about this novel if you liked it!

Note: Some parts feel extremely rushed in both the novel and drama. I wanted the bad guys to suffer more, but they all seem to die so suddenly. I'm like, "Uh, that's it?" I would have liked it more if the novel/drama went in greater details.

If you want to read more of Coca's work, check out [The Attack of the Wastrel](#). That was her first translation project.

If you want to read more of my work, check out [Grace Time](#), [The Eunuch is Pregnant](#), [Supernatural Girlfriend](#), [Your Highness, I know my wrongs](#), [Unruly Phoenix Xiaoyao](#), and/or my personal blog at [liveandlearn88.com](#)

For more drama adaptation inspired novel, check out [Poison Genius Consort](#)! They turned the novel into a drama called Legend of Yun

Xi.

Thanks again for reading, everyone! We appreciate all of your comments and support!

Sincerely,

Grace